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Captain Ironnerve, the Counterfeiter Chief; or, The Gipsy Queen's Legacy.

BY MARMADUKE DEY,

AUTHOR OF "WILL O' THE WAVE," "A LEGACY OF HATE," "A BROTHER'S SACRIFICE," "HIS OWN ENEMY," ETC., ETC.



"KEEP MUM, CAP." WARNED MOSQUITO, CAUTIOUSLY, "COS WE DON'T WANT ANY O' THE 'BILLIES' PRYIN' AROUND HERE NOW."

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CHAPTER I.

THE QUEEN'S CURSE.

A BEAUTIFUL summer night; a night redolent with the breath of the flowers, whose many odors were wafted into the darksome hut, where Vega, the Gipsy Queen, lay dying.

Slowly, but surely, her life was passing away to that distant land, where, we are told, "all is summer time." Slowly, but surely, her breath was becoming shorter and more difficult to inhale, and the threads of her life were snapping one by one.

She was very old, but the traces of a dead beauty could still be seen upon her pinched and withered features, and the white hair fell over a forehead wrinkled and pale, but beneath this shone two star-like eyes, whose strange brilliancy startled the beholder, so lurid was their gleam.

It was a common shelter where she was lying—a lonely hut far back into the woods of Virginia. A rickety apology for a stove stood in one corner, upon which a pot was boiling away, the steam escaping from 'neath the cover and floating upward, until it was lost in the mazy cobwebs and soot that formed a canopy beneath the roof proper.

Vega stirred uneasily and moaned as if in pain, while she lifted her long, bony fingers and attempted to brush back the long snowy locks that fell into her eyes.

"Will she never come?" she muttered. "Surely, it is two or three hours since she left me. Out in the night, and alone! Who knows what may happen to her, and she is all I have to accomplish my revenge."

Again Vega half-turned, emitting a low moan as the sharp pains shot through her body.

Thus a half-hour passed slowly, and at length there echoed the sound of footsteps approaching. The door opened softly, and Lorna, the old Gipsy's granddaughter, came gently to the invalid's side.

"Asleep, mother?" she asked, in a low tone, as she peered down into the face of her grandmother; but the great, black, staring eyes of the sick woman were gazing up into Lorna's equally black, but more dreamy ones, and in an impatient tone she replied:

"How could I sleep in peace with you out in the night alone, and just when I need you so much? I have something for you to do, child, and if you should fail me—but you won't! you shall not!" and the glaring eyes redoubled their lurid brilliancy as they gazed at Lorna.

"I did not mean to be so long," said the child, trying to brush away a tear that started down her cheek; "I went to the spring as you told me, but could find none of the herbs there, and so kept on to the Sighing Pine where I knew they grew in abundance. Indeed I did not mean to be absent long," and great tears began to ooze from 'neath her beautiful lashes, and roll silently downward.

Vega gave a sudden start when Lorna mentioned the "Sighing Pine," but controlling herself with an effort she merely waited until the child (for such she was, being scarcely more than sixteen) had placed the herbs in the pot, and then calling her to her she said:

"Listen, Lorna, I have a strange story to tell you. I did not mean that you should hear it so soon, but ere another day comes I will be dead."

"Oh, no! don't say that, mother; you are all I have in the world!"

"It is the Almighty's will," said Vega reverently. "We must abide by it."

After pausing a moment, she continued:

"Sixteen years ago last spring you were born. Your mother was my daughter and your father was a house-dweller. I only know his first name, which is Gordon. He was on a pleasure trip through Spain and during one of his rambles he made the acquaintance of your mother.

"Your mother was beautiful, and this Gor-

don fell in love with her and they were married.

"I knew nothing of the marriage until you came, and then my daughter told me all. She said she had met him one day and loved him, and that she had wedded him, even against the rules of her tribe.

"A council was called and it was decided to capture your father and make him join the band or put him to death, and three of the number were sent to do the deed. But the bird had flown. 'Been gone three days,' they told us, and as weeks and months fled by and no news of him came, your mother began to grow thin and pale, and finally, one bright September morning she died.

"All that she would ever tell me concerning her husband, was that he was either English or American, and she spoke of him as Gordon.

"As soon as it was possible I took you and started on his track; determined that I should find him, and compel him to own his daughter, or kill him. Do not turn pale, child! The Zingara blood in your veins must keep you brave." She paused and passed her hand across her brow.

"Give me some of the herb tea, child," and Lorna sprang quickly to comply with the request.

"This pain is killing me, but I must finish my story," said Vega, more to herself than to Lorna.

"Have you never been able to find any trace of him?" asked the child, presently.

"No, curse him! Ten years I passed in England without obtaining the slightest clew, and then I came to America. Upon the steamer there were two gentlemen who were together, and I often heard one of them address the other as 'Gordon.'

"One day in passing him I bent forward and whispered your name—it is like your mother's—Lorna, in his ear. He stared wildly, and clinching me by the wrist, led me to one side.

"What do you know of that name?" he demanded. 'Tell me!'

"She was my daughter," I replied to him, and he laughed a low cynical laugh that made my blood curdle. 'Your daughter!' he said, 'Lady Lorna Atherton your daughter?' and he laughed again and left me.

"For days, during the whole passage, I watched him, but he pretended never to see me, nor once did he speak to me again until we had arrived at New York, and then, as he was leaving the steamer he saw me and stopped.

"There may be two Lornas in the world," he said, 'but it is an uncommon name. The Lorna I know is high-born, and her mother was—ah! she was Gordon Crandyl's wife,' and with that he left.

"I endeavored to follow him, but he and his friend sprang into a carriage, and were driven away so rapidly that I could not. I have never—seen—him—since—th—that—d—day."

A rush of blood choked her, and she panted for breath. The night was almost spent; it lacked but a short time and dawn would appear.

"I shall die with the rising of the sun, Lorna," said Vega when she had regained sufficient strength to speak. "Listen! I will finish my story.

"I could not believe that the man who came over in the steamer with me was your father, and yet I am certain they are related, and I think this Gordon Crandyl is the man.

"You must find him, and become assured if he is your parent, and if so, claim your rights and his protection, and my curse will follow you if you do not."

Lorna's eyes were shining as brilliantly and as luridly as the old queen's now, and her petite figure quivered with excitement as Vega continued:

"If it had not been for that man, Gordon Crandyl, the honor of my family would have been preserved, and I would not now be dying far, far away from home and friends—a stranger in a strange land. May the curse of Heaven light on him and his race! May his own future, and the future of his offspring of house-dwellers, be as fruitless as mine; and if there is a maiden in whom he has placed his paternal love, may her fate be even as my daughter's."

She paused a moment, and then grasping Lorna's hand with a violence that sent a sharp pain up through the arm, she said in a husky tone:

"Promise me, child, that you will never give up the search for your father, and that, when found, you will claim your rights. Promise me this or I will curse you with my dying breath! See! the day is dawning. I have not long to live. Quick—promise!"

"I promise," said Lorna, in a low intense tone, for the other's excitement had lent itself to her, and she trembled in every limb.

Vega's breath began to grow shorter, and her muscles twitched with the pains that shot through them.

"I am going, Lorna—the day—is breaking to me—and to the world. If you ever visit—our people—tell them that Vega—died a true Zingara; tell them that—though in a foreign land—her thoughts were of—her people; her prayers for them.

"When I am dead—go to the Sighing Pine—rap loudly on its bark—three times—then pause—and rap again; bury me near the spring."

Lorna was weeping as though her heart would break, but the old woman put out her hand and rested it on her dark tresses.

"Don't cry, my Lorna—it is weak and childish to mourn for that we cannot remedy. We must—all die sooner or later—and when—our time comes—we must go. Don't weep—child. Be brave—and true—and remember—all the lessons—I—have taught you. And don't neglect your mission—it is my legacy."

"Oh, mother—mother! don't leave me alone!" and the child dropped on her knees by the side of the rude couch and wept aloud.

"I must, darling; it is—God's will."

She gasped for breath and then went on.

"You will find some money—in the ground—under this couch. It is yours—don't—forget—my—legacy—go—Sighing—Pine. Baldo—help you. —Good—by—God—bless—you—ah!"

She was dead.

As the last spark of life flickered and went out, the sun rose over the tops of the hills, and his glorious light proclaimed the Gipsy's words: "I shall die with the rising of the sun."

For some time after life had fled from Vega's body, Lorna sat quite still, except for an occasional sob that seemed to shake her whole body.

What was she, a young girl scarcely more than sixteen years of age, to do, alone in the great world, without a home except the hut she now occupied? Without a friend in the wide earth! But stop! what had Vega meant by telling her to go to the Sighing Pine and rap in that mysterious manner? Who was there? Baldo? Who was Baldo?

She had not paid any attention to these things when the dying woman had spoken of them, but now they came to her with a thousand questionings, and she sprang quickly to her feet, brushed the tears from her eyes, threw a blanket over the dead body, straightened up things about the hut, and then passing out and locking the door securely, sped away toward the Sighing Pine.

As she started away over the bright green moss that sparkled in the morning light, the figure of a man, clad in an embroidered hunting dress, and with a gun slung over his shoulder, stepped from among the trees and watched her as she gradually disappeared from view.

"By Jove!" he muttered to himself, "not half bad for the back-woods. I'm in a hurry now, so I'll call again, Miss Wood-nymph, or my name is not Ralph Gordon," and whistling softly to himself, he strode away into the woods.

CHAPTER II.

BALDO—A PHOTOGRAPH.

AN hour's brisk walk brought Lorna to the Sighing Pine, and after hesitating an instant, she stooped and picked up a fallen limb and drew near to the tree.

She had not hesitated or stopped a moment to think what might be the consequences of the signal she was about to give. She trusted blindly in the word of the old woman—trusted her with that faith which is given by continual intercourse and habitual belief.

She knew perfectly well that something of moment would transpire, or her grandmother would not have given her the directions. The name "Baldo" kept ringing through her brain, and with a firm hand and steadily beating heart, she smote the shaggy bark thrice.

She waited and no response came.

It was an enormous tree, whose high top far overtopped weaker growth around, but

when Lorna struck it, it sent forth a hollow sound; but still no answer came.

Suddenly she remembered she was to strike it four times, with a pause between the third and fourth strokes, and accordingly she rapped again.

This time the reply was immediate.

A door, so well concealed that the closest inspection would have failed to discover it, flew open, and a rough, rasping voice within called out:

"What do ye want?"

Lorna sprung back in dismay when the door opened so suddenly and the harsh voice spoke to her, but recovering herself quickly, she came to the opening.

"Vega sent me," was all she said, and a little shriveled, dried-up specimen of humanity slipped through the aperture.

Lorna started back with a cry of alarm at this ungainly spectacle, but the stranger merely gave utterance to a hollow chuckle, that sounded like the rattle of skeleton's bones, and stuck out his long bony fingers.

"You're Lorna, I suppose. What does Vega want?"

"Are you Baldo?" asked Lorna, instead of replying to his question.

"Yes—I'm Baldo."

If he had stood erect he might have measured five feet or more, but he was so bent that he looked no more than four.

Little black, beady eyes peered from under a pair of white, shaggy eyebrows, and though the hair was missing from the top of his head, yet it grew in abundance around the sides of the scalp and fell in long, snowy, unkempt ringlets over his shoulders. His bent form rested itself upon a knotted stick, and altogether Old Baldo looked a veritable "Nick-o'-the-Woods."

"Vega died this morning," said Lorna, as soon as the old man assured her of his identity, "and she told me to come to you."

"He-he-he!" chuckled Baldo. "Dead, eh? Well, we've all got to die some time. I s'pose you want me to bury her, eh? Come inside, child, an' I'll go with you soon. He, he, he! Dead." And Baldo hobbled, rather than walked, into the tree, closely followed by Lorna.

Meanwhile, other scenes of equal interest were being enacted, and as they will eventually have to do with our story, I will describe them at once.

When Ralph Gordon turned from the scene of the Gipsy's hut and strode off through the woods, he was busily thinking where such a beauty as the one he had just seen could spring from, and why it was hidden away in this dense forest, whose solitude was seldom penetrated.

"Surely Crandyl cannot be aware of her presence," he mused, as he walked leisurely onward through the brightening day; and there was more meaning in that half-spoken sentence than he would have confessed even to himself.

"Somehow," he continued, "this girl has destroyed my taste for hunting for to-day. By Jove! she was a beauty, though, and no mistake. I'll go back to the Lodge and tell the folks of my discovery."

He branched off, and, taking a short cut, walked rapidly toward the point at which he was stopping.

Ralph Gordon, at first sight, would not be pronounced even good-looking, but, as one became acquainted with him, the charm of his manner, his easy grace, and firm, determined spirit so influenced those about him, that he was invariably spoken of among his friends as handsome.

He was tall and splendidly built, and walked as though if necessary he could spring forward at any instant. His hair was inky in its blackness and clustered in wavy curls around a broad forehead, whose clearness was considerably darkened by constant exposure to the sun and wind. A jet-black mustache shaded a pair of thin red lips, set tightly together in a straight line that plainly indicated an unbending spirit, and his carriage was erect and noble. But the most remarkable feature of the man was his eyes.

They were of a deep gray, set wide apart and shaded by long black lashes. There was a subtle magnetism about them that held a listener almost spell-bound when he was talking.

An easy, careless man of the world was

Ralph Gordon, and yet possessing a nature whose intensity all feared to arouse.

He was but a short time traversing the distance that separated him from Laurel Lodge, as the place was called, and as he crossed the beautiful flower-garden that surrounded it, a pleasant feminine voice called out:

"What! so soon, Ralph?"

"Yes," he replied, without turning to look back. "I don't feel in a hunting mood to-day."

He kept steadily on to his room, and reaching it, threw off his coat and hat and stretched himself upon a sofa.

"Strange!" he muttered. "Why does that girl's face haunt me so? Can it be possible that I have seen it before? By Jove! I have it," and hastily going to his dressing-case, he lifted an inlaid box from one of the drawers and proceeded to rummage among a number of photographs that it contained.

He sat there some time, slowly turning the pictures over, when, suddenly uttering his favorite exclamation, he extracted one, and going with it to the window, gazed at it a moment in silence.

"Humph!" he exclaimed, finally, "nothing could be more like."

It was the exact counterpart of Lorna, the Gipsy's granddaughter, and as he gazed at it, Ralph Gordon muttered:

"There is some mystery about this. It is exactly like the 'Wood-Nymph,' and it looks deucedly like my Lady Lorna, too; and now that I think of it, those girls look enough alike to be twin sisters. What the deuce does it mean?"

"What does what mean?" asked a voice behind him, and turning suddenly, Ralph found himself face to face with Gordon Crandyl.

"Why, this," said Ralph. "Here is a picture I have had in my possession for the last ten years, and now I find a little elf running about your woods who not only looks like it, but of whom it is the exact counterpart, and yet again it resembles Lorna, your daughter."

Crandyl took the picture in his hand, but dropped it as if it had been a coal of fire, and started back with a cry of dismay.

"Where did you get that picture?" he gasped; and he bent eagerly forward to hear the reply.

"I have forgotten exactly how I became possessed of it," said Ralph; "but I have had it a long time.—But what is the matter, man?"

Gordon Crandyl was as white as a sheet, and he trembled in every limb, but an ugly frown was upon his brow as he bent forward and said, in a hard, grinding tone:

"You took that picture from among my effects; you stole it!" The last words were almost hissed into Ralph's ears, so excited was the man before him.

Ralph Gordon sprang forward when Crandyl uttered that insulting speech, and catching him by the throat, hurled him in a heap to the end of the room.

"Gordon Crandyl, you lie!" he exclaimed, as he flung him down. "I would kill some men for less than that. Leave me!"

The fallen man rose slowly to his feet and glared at the younger one.

"You will repent that blow, bitterly," he said, as he turned to leave the apartment. "You are deeper in my toils than you think, Ralph Gordon, and as sure as there is a God I will tighten them."

Ralph quietly turned his back to him. He had regained his usual self-control, and all the men in Christendom could not ruffle his temper into another outbreak.

Gordon Crandyl left the room, muttering.

CHAPTER III. A FALSE CHARGE.

IN one of the elegant mansions in Richmond was the scene of another death-bed, not unlike the one in our first chapter, except for the splendor which surrounded it, and moreover, the sufferer was a man.

He was pale and emaciated with long suffering, and now that the end was approaching, his eyes were closed tightly and he seemed utterly oblivious to everything around him.

The doctors had said he might last days or even weeks yet, or he might pass away in an hour or at any moment, so uncertain was his disease.

Paul Leonard's life had been a changeful one, and now he was fast nearing "that bourn from which no traveler returns."

A drop-light, designed for the sick-room,

burned lowly on the center table, and near it, with a book resting on her lap sat a young girl, evidently lost in meditation, for the leaves of the book fluttered idly backward and forward in the soft breeze that ever and anon came rustling through the open casement.

Presently she lifted the book and turning over several pages she comes to a letter which she opens and reads for perhaps the twentieth time.

It was written in a clear, bold, masculine hand and reads like this:

"LAUREL LODGE, July 21st, 18—.

"MY DEAR COUSIN LILLIAN:

"I had a serious misunderstanding with Crandyl last evening, and if convenient I would like to spend a few days with you and uncle Paul, until the affair blows over. We were both excited and neither accountable for what we said or did, and although this property is as much mine as his, still I would like to vacate for a time for the sake of the tempers of both. I trust uncle Paul is better and that he may eventually recover.

"Affectionately your relative,
"RALPH GORDON."

The letter had come early the day before and Lillian had replied to it immediately, urging her cousin—for such Ralph Gordon appeared to be—to make all haste and come as soon as possible, and if trains had proven themselves on time he would be there in a few minutes.

Even while she was reading the letter, there was a sharp ring at the door-bell and presently a servant softly entered the room and announced "Mr. Ralph Gordon" and quietly withdrew.

Hastily smoothing back her blonde tresses, Lillian cast a loving glance at the sick man, who was to all appearances sleeping quietly, and left the room, gently closing the door behind her. She had scarcely accomplished the above action however when the curtains that hung in graceful folds about the windows were rudely pushed aside from one of them, and the figure of a man glided quickly toward the bedside.

He might have seen as many as fifty years come and go, but the vigor of his frame and the agility of his movements were as supple and cat-like as though he were still a young man. In stature he was scarcely more than five feet, low, dark brows; round, bullet head, covered with short, crisp black hair, slightly touched by the frosts of the winters they had passed through. In his right hand he bore a long, murderous looking knife.

Approaching the bed he laid his hand roughly on the brow of the sick man.

"Wake up, Paul Leonard!" he said, in a gruff, rasping voice. "You and I have got an account to settle which must be settled to-night. There is interest for sixteen years standing on the debt you owe me, and by — I'll have it!"

With a start Paul Leonard opened his eyes and gazed affrightedly at the speaker.

"Who are you?" he said. "My eyes are dim—I cannot see you."

"Well, you will soon feel me," answered the gruff voice, and this time the man on the bed trembled violently.

"Can it be possible that it is Mengari's voice I hear?" he said, more to himself than to the figure beside him.

"It is more than possible; it is the simple fact; Mengari, now Jim Munger! dead to you for sixteen years; has come back to torture your last moments on earth, for I see I was just in time, or the Almighty would have cheated me out of my revenge. Say your prayers, old man, for I am going to kill you."

"Mercy—mercy!" moaned the dying man trying to raise his hands to his tormentor, but the muscles were too nearly worn out and the withered members fell back into the bed-clothes helplessly.

"Mercy!" sneered the intruder. "Did you give it when my poor sister crouched upon her knees at your feet and begged for it for the sake of her child? Did you give it when Tom Gordon, your own nephew and my best friend, placed everything he had in the world in your hands for safe keeping? Ha, ha! he might as well have thrown it in the James River for preservation; and did you show mercy when Vega, the Gipsy, came to you in want, with her little granddaughter clinging in a starving condition to the folds of her dress? No! you cast them from you—and why? Ah, you shudder! because you knew that that child had as much claim on you as it had on Vega, and you knew she could not find it out. You did not know that I was alive. But I am alive and here to make you suffer. Mercy? Ha, ha, ha! this is the mercy I give

you," and as he spoke, the knife was raised high in the air and descended with a sickening thud deep into the invalid's bosom.

With a hollow groan, Paul Leonard half turned, and for a moment glared up into the fiendish eyes above him.

"Curse—you,—Jim—Munger!" he said. "Curse you!" then the eyelids half closed, the limbs gradually stiffened out, and Paul Leonard's soul had gone to his Maker with its burden of sin.

Leaving the knife protruding from the man's bosom, Munger proceeded to look about the room as coolly as though nothing unusual had occurred.

He finally espied a small cabinet standing upon a table in one corner, and approaching this, he pressed his finger upon a concealed spring, as though perfectly acquainted with its mechanism, at which a small drawer flew suddenly open, revealing a number of papers lying at the bottom. Lifting these up, the man took from beneath them a small book, that had the appearance of a diary, bound in red leather, and placing this in the breast pocket of his coat, he stole to the window and disappeared behind the folds of the curtain.

He took his departure just in time, for he had scarcely left when the door opened and Lillian, accompanied by Ralph, entered the apartment.

"Here is Ralph, uncle Paul," she said, but no answer was returned, and thinking he must be sleeping, she came near to the bedside, and then she saw the awful truth.

Blood was slowly trickling from the murdered man's bosom, and the bed-clothes were dyed in the sickening red, while the wicked knife yet was sticking there as if in mockery of the life it had taken.

With a cry of horror Lillian started back.

"Who has done this?" she cried. "Oh, who has murdered my only friend?" and then with a scream of more than mortal agony, she prostrated herself across the body of the deceased.

Ralph—the man of iron—was speechless with surprise, but now he stepped forward and attempted to lift the form of his cousin from the bed; but even as he stooped to do so there was a bustle outside, the door was thrown open violently and two policemen with Gordon Crandyl at their head, and closely followed by the servants of the household, entered the room.

Quickly stepping to Ralph's side one of the policemen placed his hand upon the young man's shoulder and in deep, measured tones said:

"Ralph Gordon, you are my prisoner."

"For what?" cried Ralph, springing back.

"For being concerned in the manufacture of counterfeit money, Mr. Gordon; alias Roving Ralph; alias Captain Ironnerve," and so completely stunned was he by this reply, that before he was aware of it, the handcuffs had been placed on his wrists and he was a prisoner.

Meanwhile the other officer and Gordon Crandyl had discovered the body of Paul Leonard with that of Lillian lying upon it, and with a meaning sneer in his voice as the servants lifted the fair girl from the bed and bore her to a sofa, Crandyl said:

"In all probability the counterfeiter knows more of the murder than he would care to tell."

With a spring like a tiger Ralph leaped forward and before it could be prevented he had brought his manacled hands down upon the head of his reviler, and Gordon Crandyl sunk stunned and bleeding to the floor, and then turning to the officers Ralph said:

"There is some awful mistake here, gentlemen; I am neither a counterfeiter, nor a murderer. It is evidently the enmity of that man that has placed me in this position. My right name is Ralph Gordon and I know none of the aliases you have given me."

"It is a lie!" shouted Crandyl, partly raising himself. "Ralph Gordon is dead, and you are not only a counterfeiter but a counterfeiter."

And in spite of all his protestations, Ralph Gordon was led away to the city prison and thrust into a musty cell, while on the slate that hung by the side of the door was written:

"CAPTAIN IRONNERVE, THE COUNTERFEITER."

CHAPTER IV. BEHIND THE BARS.

Not until the cell doors had closed with a bang upon Ralph Gordon, did he fully realize what had befallen him; but then it came upon

him with a rush, and in his mind's eye he beheld himself convicted of a crime he had never committed. Sentenced to how many years he knew not in State's Prison for making counterfeit money, and yet innocent of the charge!

"But," he reasoned to himself, "surely there can be found no evidence to convict me. I must have friends who can swear to my identity."

The prison authorities would not even believe his name to be Ralph Gordon, and when he insisted that it was, and would give no other, wrote the name of Captain Ironnerve upon the slip outside his cell.

Then who was Captain Ironnerve?

Ralph asked himself again and again, but he could give no satisfactory answer to the question.

Sick at heart, he rapped loudly on the door, and when the keeper appeared, asked if there was not some one whom he could send out for a paper, that he might while away the tedious hours reading the news.

"There's Mosquito," said the man gruffly, and strode away, and presently there appeared the figure of a little lad at the bars, who peered through them curiously, until finally, as if satisfied with his scrutiny, he winked one eye and said:

"Hullo, Cap! want me?"

"Yes," said Ralph. "Can you get me a paper?"

"To be—coursely!" was the highly satisfactory response. "Got the swag?"

"The what?"

"The ringers—rocks—spondulix!"

"Certainly," and Ralph passed a silver half-dollar through the bars to the boy outside.

Taking it eagerly in his hand, Mosquito eyed it suspiciously for a moment and then again glanced at the prisoner.

"Say, boss, be you the queer 'un?"

"The what?" asked Ralph again, for he was mystified by the queer expressions that the lad used.

"The feller wot's in for shovin' the queer."

"Oh! Yes, I suppose that is what I am here for, but I am innocent of the charge," said Ralph, biting the ends of his mustache.

"You don't say so!" exclaimed the mischievous little imp sticking his tongue in his cheek and winking again in a provoking manner. "Well, maybe you be. There's a feller next door to you who murdered a chap the other day; he's innocent, too, but there was a dozen as saw him do it. But the covey's innocent, sure!" and gayly whistling "Blackwell's Isle," the prison-boy ran away on his errand.

With an icy feeling at his heart Ralph sunk back upon the iron bedstead and buried his face in his hands.

He sat thus for some time, when suddenly springing to his feet he impatiently stamped his foot upon the square blocks of marble that formed the floor of his cell.

Was it fancy, or did the block move beneath his foot?

Going quickly to the bars, he peered up and down the corridor, but no one was near his part of the prison, and he turned, dropped upon his knees, and endeavored to insert his fingers in the crack between the blocks.

"Gordon Crandyl is to blame for my being here," he muttered, "and by Heaven I will make him pay for it! Time enough to return for my trial when that is accomplished, if I can only make my escape now."

There was a fierce look in his eyes as he crouched there on the prison floor, trying with all his might to remove the loose block of marble. Try as he might, however, the stone refused to move, and at last, in despair, he arose to his feet and turned to see the mischievous eyes of Mosquito looking at him through the bars.

"Tryin' it on already, Cap? It's a bad game, though, an' I'll bet you ten to one it don't work."

For a moment Ralph was stunned to find that his actions had been watched, but quickly recovering himself, he moved hastily to the door.

"Young man, are you fond of money?" he asked, peering searchingly into the boy's face.

"S-u-m, some!" was the quiet response.

"Well, listen. If you can assist me to get out of this place, I will give you—how much would you like to have? You would be doing no wrong, you know, for I am innocent, and never heard of Captain Ironnerve until the officers arrested me. How much would you like to have?"

"Well, that depends," responded Mosquito. "I'm gittin' some sick o' this place myself, an' if you poney up O. K. and promise not to let me git nabbed, I might be the cove wot freed ye. I'm the chap as can do it if I wants to, you bet!"

"I'll give you five hundred dollars," said Ralph, overjoyed at his success.

"That settles it; where's yer security?"

"My word, young man; I never broke it."

"Whew!" whistled Mosquito, suspiciously.

"You don't say so!"

"Come—I'll make it a thousand."

"Put 'er there," and the grimy hand was thrust through the bars and tightly clasped in the large, warm palm of Ralph Gordon.

"When will we go to work, and how?" asked Ralph at last, in vain trying to hide his impatience.

"Mum's the word!" whispered Mosquito, quickly. "Here's the keeper comin' this way. You will hear from me when you ain't lookin' for it," and then, as the watchman drew near—"That's too thin, Cap; it don't work for a cent! They's all as innocent as new-born babes when they comes, but the judge salts 'em down just the same. It don't work! Ha! ha! ha! So long!" and he turned and ran away, laughing loudly, much to the discomfort of Ralph, who fancied that the boy had been making game of him, and that all his plans and sophistry had been for naught.

The keeper came along, looked into the cell a moment, and then passed on, and Ralph was left to his meditations.

About twelve hours had passed since he had been so rudely thrust into prison, and already the confinement had become very irksome.

At last, picking up the paper Mosquito had brought to him, he glanced at the headings, but with a cry, he dashed the sheet from him and sprung to his feet.

The first thing upon which his eyes had fallen was printed in large capitals at the top of the page:

"CAUGHT AT LAST."

"THE NOTED CAPTAIN IRONNERVE IN CUSTODY—THE DESPERATE MAN IS CAGED WITH LITTLE DIFFICULTY."

And then followed a long account of what the world would believe to be his career, and the verbatim report of the reporter's conversation with him. (The reporter had never seen him at all that he was aware of.)

Calmly he read the libel to the end, and then he threw himself upon the hard bed which formed—with the exception of a stool—the only furniture in the cell, and soon succeeded in dropping into a peaceful doze, from which he did not awaken until the shadows of evening were beginning to fall on the earth, and his keeper made his appearance with the usual evening meal.

He had almost given up the idea of escape through the agency of Mosquito, and yet there lurked in his mind some vague idea that this would be his last meal in Richmond prison.

But help was near though he knew it not.

CHAPTER V.

THE SIGHING PINE.

SILENTLY, and without any fear, Lorna followed Baldo into the giant tree, whose trunk had so readily thrown open its doors to her. She did not stop to think of any danger that might be concealed there, but followed in the footsteps of the old man without so much as a thought of what might lie hidden in the tree's mysterious depths.

As soon as they had entered, Baldo closed the door with a bang, and striking a light, applied it to a candle which he took from his pocket, and proceeded to lead the way down a lengthy flight of steps, Lorna passing along close behind him without asking a question.

Reaching the foot of the steps, they followed the passage in a straight line for fully fifty feet, when it suddenly branched off, one passage leading directly to the right, and the other directly to the left. Taking the one that led to the left, they followed along this for perhaps a hundred feet more, when they were brought to a stand-still by a huge oaken door, completely covered by brass nails, which sparkled brightly in the flickering light of the candle.

Baldo paused a moment when they reached this door, and regarded his companion strangely for an instant.

"Stand back a little," he said, presently.

"I want to show you the effect this door

would have upon any one who tried to break it open."

Picking up a stone that lay at his feet, he cast it against the solid oak and nail-heads, when, as if by magic, the brass knobs fell aside, revealing a hollow behind each one.

"You see," said the old man, with a smile of satisfaction on his countenance, "that should any one attempt to gain admittance here unasked, their first move on reaching this door would be to break it down. The first stroke they made would cause the nail-heads to drop aside, but would reveal nothing but so many holes in their places. But the next stroke would send five hundred bullets whizzing up this passage, for each place you see there is the muzzle of a pistol-barrel. They are all worked by the same spring, and the spring connects with each brass nail, so you see it would be impossible to strike the door without working the springs. The other passage is protected in the same manner."

"But why do you need this protection?" asked Lorna, whose curiosity was at last aroused.

"That you shall see presently," answered Baldo, as he touched a spring in the side of the corridor which caused the knobs to fly back to their places; and then another, at which the door swung slowly open, revealing a similar passageway beyond.

Through this second corridor they traversed for some distance, when reaching another door, Baldo, by means of another secret spring threw it open, and Lorna found herself in a large, square room, furnished with simple elegance, and evidently with an eye to comfort, for settees and divans were scattered here and there, while handsome rugs almost hid the floor from view.

A desk stood in one corner, and a large iron chest in another; pictures that a connoisseur might delight to gaze upon, hung from the walls, and from the center of the ceiling hung suspended a large chandelier of cut-glass, from the angles of which, varied colored lights were scintillating, giving the room, or rather cavern, a beautiful and yet a ghostly appearance.

Upon the desk, which stood open, a common student-lamp was burning, and altogether the place looked the home of luxuriance, ease and solitude.

Lorna almost gasped with surprise when Baldo led her into the beautiful apartment. It was like Fairy-land to her, who had only been accustomed to the commonest kind of living, and to tramping about all day in the woods, picking the flowers and listening to the varied and joyous songs of the many birds, whose plumage and names she was very familiar with; but to enter an old pine tree, by way of a door that she had never dreamed existed, and passing from that, through a long dark corridor into this abode of elegance, seemed to her like enchantment. She could only gaze around the place, speechless, and astonishment depicted upon every feature.

Baldo smiled, half pleased, at her surprise, and motioning her to one of the couches, he seated himself on the huge chest in the corner and said:

"Well, my child, you appear to be somewhat astonished."

"Oh, I am indeed!" she replied, looking up into his face in wonder.

"Do you like the looks of things here?" asked the old man.

Had Lorna been older and more experienced in the ways and mannerisms of the world, she would probably have said no; but living as she had, with no knowledge of what was transpiring around her, and coming of a race whose blood clamors for gold and the luxuries it can buy, she was pleased, and clapping her hands and laughing, answered yes. Her simple nature and uneducated mind could not stop to reason as to the whys and wherefores of this mysterious retreat; she only knew that it existed, and that she was pleased.

"Would you like to live here all the time?" again asked Baldo, after a pause, in which he had been regarding her closely.

"Couldn't I go out into the woods, among the birds and flowers, at all?" she asked, tremulously.

"Certainly! you could go out all you liked."

"Then I would like to live here; oh, so much!"

"You shall, my child."

"Oh, may I indeed?" and a glad smile wreathed itself about her beautifully-formed mouth.

"Vega is dead, and you could not live all alone in that miserable hut; besides, I promised her that I would take care of you, and in order to do that, I must have you near me."

"But you must conform to two or three things which will be necessary to your welfare if you remain. I am not the only inhabitant of this place, by far, although they mostly mind what I say. Still, it is one of their set rules that no petticoats be allowed in the 'Pine,' and I have brought you here at the risk of my life."

"But why?"

"You shall see. In this chest you will find a number of suits of clothes, and one out of the lot will be sure to fit you. I will leave you for a time, and when I return I want to find a boy instead of a girl waiting to receive me. Do you understand?"

"But my hair?"

"I will cut it."

"And my ear-rings?"

"You must remove them."

"My voice?"

"You must make it rougher."

"My name—what of that?"

"I had not thought of that; but I will have one for you when I return," and with this, Baldo left her.

"Am I dreaming, or is this a reality?" thought Lorna, as she proceeded toward the chest, and threw back the lid.

Coats, caps, pants, boots, shoes, everything that goes to make up the dress of a man, was scattered promiscuously in the chest, and Lorna, anxious not only to get the best, but the one which would fit her the nicest, pulled them all upon the floor.

Finally selecting one of the suits, she donned it, and then viewed herself in the mirror that hung immediately in front of her.

"I rather like this," she thought. "I wonder if any one will know that I am a girl. But I must put those things back in their places, or Baldo will scold."

While folding them up, and taking more pains with the packing than the one had done who had the job before her, something in the pocket of one of the coats attracted her attention, and with the curiosity natural to her sex, she inserted her hand, and drew it out, inclosing an enameled case which she quickly opened.

The face in the case was that of a young girl, in the fancy dress of a Spanish Gipsy dancing-girl, with a tambourine in her hand, and she was poised in the dancing attitude.

"Oh, isn't she handsome?" sighed Lorna as she gazed upon the face before her, and not knowing why, but obeying an instinct she could not name she placed the picture in one of her now numerous pockets, and then thrusting the remainder of the things into the chest, she closed the lid and seated herself to await the return of Baldo.

She had not long to wait, for presently the door opened, and he came into the room.

"Ah, Lawrence; dressed already?"

For a moment Lorna did not reply, thinking that he was speaking to some other person, but he was looking so pointedly at her, that she said:

"Is that the new name I am to take, Baldo?"

"Yes; and you make a first-class looking lad, too. Now, Lawrence, I will cut your hair."

Taking a large pair of shears, the child's beautiful locks were soon shorn completely from her head, and then with a cap set jauntily upon one side, she looked every inch a boy—and a fine one too, as Baldo had said.

Not satisfied with this the old man went to his desk and produced some cigarettes, gave them to her, bidding her she must learn to smoke.

"But they will make me sick," she said smiling up into his face.

"Nonsense! they will do you good, and in order to become a model young man you must smoke."

We will leave her now for a time, trying to master one of the cigarettes, and with each spasmodic puff, gradually becoming paler and paler, for the nicotine was getting into her head and making her dizzy, and into her stomach and making her sick.

She had entered upon a new life, and a life of lawlessness, although she knew it not, but, "where no wrong is intended no wrong is done," reads an old proverb, and the case of Gipsy Lorna, proved eventually the proof of the maxim.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ESCAPE FROM PRISON.

NIGHT had fallen; dark, dismal, and cloudy, and yet no rain was falling.

The steady tramp of the guard might be heard about the prison, as they monotonously paced back and forth, now and then shouting the cry "all's well," and passing on, to again repeat it as each half-hour of time dragged itself slowly by.

It was dragging slowly enough to Ralph Gordon, as he impatiently paced from one end of his narrow cell to the other, as if trying to imitate the guard without.

Occasionally he would glance at his watch—which he had bribed the keeper to allow him to retain, and then close it with a snap, as if the time as it wore heavily along, annoyed him by its tardiness.

"Twelve o'clock!" he muttered as he glanced at the time-piece for perhaps the fiftieth time during the last two hours. "If he comes to-night it must be soon. Ah!"

The exclamation was caused by hearing a voice speak in a low tone, apparently right at his feet.

"Hist!" it said, that was all.

"Who and what are you?" asked Ralph in a low tone, and turning quickly.

"Mosquito," was the quick reply, and indeed there was no need of the assurance for Ralph could now plainly see the head of the lad, poked partly into the cell, through an opening in the floor, exactly where he had discovered the loose block some little time before.

"Keep mum, Cap," warned Mosquito, cautiously, "cos we don't want any o' the 'Billies' pryin' around here now. How about that thousand, eh?"

"It's yours as soon as you get me out of here," assured Ralph excitedly.

"An' you won't gi' me away?"

"No, my boy—I won't!"

"Swear it, Cap, cos they would hang me sure."

"I do swear it! And now make haste."

"Got every thing you want?" asked Mosquito after a pause.

"Yes."

"Sure?"

"Of course I'm sure. What would I have in this cursed hole that I would care to take away with me?"

"Your temper, Cap—keep that."

"A wise rebuke, young man. You are older than you look."

"Not much; but I've see'd life, I have," and the lad wagged his head knowingly, as if to impress the fact deeply upon the mind of his hearer.

"Come," he continued laconically, and disappeared from view.

Somewhat surprised, but determined to escape from his cell at any cost, Ralph let himself down through the narrow opening, and upon alighting, found himself upon a flight of steps, which apparently led up to the cell he had just left.

"Hol' on till I shut the trap," said the voice of Mosquito, for it was so dark in the passage that Ralph could not distinguish an object.

Soon the trap was closed and then the lad scratched a match, lighting up a long flight of steps that seemed to lead down, down, down, until they 'disappeared in the gloom.

"Now sh'p!" ordered the boy, when the match had gone out. "I've got a Jack at the bottom of the steps, and when we get there we can see our way, but you have got to feel your way until we get there."

Mosquito took the lead and Ralph followed as closely after him as he could in the impenetrable darkness that hung over all, and at last, after going down step after step until it seemed as though they were descending to the very bowels of the earth, Mosquito stopped, and soon the corridor was brilliantly lighted by the rays of the "jack" he had spoken of.

"Now, Cap," said the lad, in a low tone, "this passage leads along for some distance, and is safe enough, but when you get near the entrance you want to close the slide and wait until you hear me whistle."

"Why, where are you going?"

"Through another passage to get a boat."

"A boat!"

"Cert! This takes you straight to the river, and it's pleasanter settin' in a boat than 'tis to flop around in the water; besides, it makes less of a racket, and the water makes one feel damp."

Having thus delivered himself, he placed the

light in Ralph's hand, and, turning back, was quickly lost in the intense gloom behind them.

For a moment Ralph stood quite still, thinking of the remarkable things that had happened to him lately, and his thoughts drifted back to the cousin whom he had left, almost wild with grief at the loss of her uncle Paul, and who must now be indeed almost beside herself to think that he, Ralph, should be accused of such a horrible murder.

"I'll let Lillie know of my whereabouts as soon as I get out of this," he muttered, "for I could trust her with anything, and moreover, she knows how innocent I am. Ugh!" he exclaimed as the remembrance of the time of his arrest flashed upon him. "Gordon Crandyl, you will pay dearly for your participation in this! I will leave no stone unturned to ascertain every important page in the history of your life, and peruse it. That there is something under the oil of your manner, I have long thought, and I believe to-night if the real Captain Ironnerve was in my place, that Gordon Crandyl would be the one—and by Jove!" he thought again, his mind having become more active than usual, on account of the exciting scenes he was passing through. "There is certainly something about that picture, and its remarkable resemblance to Lorna Atherton. What can it be? Has Crandyl some secret in his life that he is afraid I will find out, and to which that picture is a clue? Bah! how things are getting mixed up, and—by Jove!"

This last exclamation was followed by his springing three or four feet into the air, and was caused by a rat, who, probably thinking the man had been emulating a statue long enough, had quietly waltzed up and taken a tender morsel from the calf of his leg.

However, the bite brought the man back to himself, and he realized that he must be getting toward the entrance, or Mosquito would come for him, and not finding him, might leave, thinking that something had happened.

With this thought to spur him on, he was not long in proceeding on his way down the underground passage.

After walking briskly along for some distance, the passage made an abrupt turn, and ten feet further on, another one, in its original direction.

"The boy didn't say anything about these turns," mused Ralph, doubtfully, when his sentence was brought to an abrupt termination by a hand being laid on his shoulder and a gruff voice in his ear, saying:

"I say, stranger, whar ye goin'?"

With one bound Ralph was fully ten feet away, but only to find that another hand was laid on his shoulder, and more heavily, and another voice said:

"Don't be in any hurry, my covey. I reckon thar's loads o' time, and besides, we wants a right smart visit with ye."

"What do you want?" asked Ralph, who saw at once that force would be of no avail, and who rightly guessed that these men—of whom he could now see four—were in no way connected with the prison.

"Whar you goin'?" again asked the one who had spoken first.

"Crazy—unless I get out of here," was Ralph's quick reply.

"Haw, haw, haw!!!"

"You're smart, ain't ye?"

"Sometimes," said Ralph. "Are you through with your visit? because if you are I would like to proceed on my way. My friend will be getting impatient."

"Your friend! who is he?"

"An old man with white hair; know him?"

"Two to one it's 'Skeeter!' cried one of the men, who seemed to have more to say than the others. "Be you Captain Ironnerve, young feller?"

"No, sir."

"Ain't ye called that?"

"I have been lately, but wrongly."

"Perzackly! it's allers wrong when it ain't welcome. And young 'Skeeter's gittin' ye out, eh?"

"I didn't say so."

"Oh! didn't ye?" and the fellow laughed again, coarsely.

"Are you going to let me go?"

"When 'Skeeter comes, ye can go, but ye can't go very far, unless you go with us. Come, pard!" he added. "Come along, Cap; we'll find 'Skeet at the mouth of the cave, and he'll go quick enough," and so saying, he grasped Ralph by the arm and led him toward the entrance, where they found Mosquito sit-

ting quietly in a boat, and, to all appearance, settled there for the rest of the night.

He seemed not at all surprised to find the four men with Ralph, but quietly backed the boat around, no one speaking a word, allowed them all to clamber noiselessly in, and without a word rowed away in the darkness.

They had proceeded for some distance, when there was a cry from the prison walls that caused the leader of the four men to lean forward and take the oars from Mosquito's hands, adding his own giant strength to that of the boy's, and propelling the boat swiftly through the water.

"Who goes there?" came the cry, and one of the men seated in the stern cried back:

"None o' yer dog-goned bizness!"

"Who goes there?" again came the voice.

"Answer, or I'll fire!"

"Fire, and be —!"

A flash a cracking report—a whirr—and Ralph Gordon throws up his arms, and emitting a hollow groan, sinks to the bottom of the boat.

The ball had done its work, and he lay there a mass of quivering flesh, who had almost gotten off entirely free.

Is his purpose to be foiled?

Time will show.

CHAPTER VII.

MY LADY LORNA.

THE reader will remember the occasion of Ralph Gordon's seeing Gipsy Lorna in the woods upon the eventful day when so much that was unpleasant happened him.

He will also remember the pleasant little voice that addressed Ralph as he strode through the grounds into Laurel Lodge, and as we have now to introduce the Lady Lorna Atherton, I want him to recall the picture of the little Gipsy girl as it was drawn at the opening of our story.

Imagine a person so like the orphan girl, that were they together, only the apparel could designate them. True the Lady Lorna was the older by several years, but so matured was the Gipsy—whom for the present we will call Lawrence—that this could not be used as a criterion in describing them.

My Lady Lorna was certainly a beauty, and scores had knelt at her feet, imploring for but a small sign of reciprocity for their love, but she turned from all in her haughty, imperious way, contented that her lot should remain single for at least some time to come.

She had been courted by nobles, both poor and rich, but all had gone from her side with the impression that Lorna Atherton was as cold as ice.

But she was not, for she loved.

Loved madly, passionately, devotedly, completely, and the object of that love was Ralph Gordon, who in his turn was to her as he always had been to all, indifferent.

He did not know of the devotion that was showered upon him, and had he known it, would only have shrugged his shoulder and murmured a half audible "By Jove!"

Lorna Atherton was the ward of Gordon Crandyl and had lived with him since her infancy. Indeed, she knew of no one else to whom she could be indebted for any thing the world had to offer, and although she always addressed him as uncle, he seemed to her like a father, always treating her with the care and thoughtfulness of a parent.

While sitting quietly in a shady nook on the above mentioned day, half sleeping, and ever and anon idly turning over the leaves of the last French novel, she had heard Ralph's step upon the gravel, and rousing herself from her reverie, spoke to him, fully expecting that he would come to her for a quiet *tele-a-tete*, but when he gave her the careless answer and passed on into the house, her disappointment was so great that she burst into tears.

"Oh, why must I suffer so?" she moaned.

"I who could have married into the highest and noblest families of England, must needs weep and wait for the love of a simple mister. It is weak, foolish, childish! let him go his way, I can live without him," she continued, ashamed of her tears.

"But I do love him so," she exclaimed again as the thought of all the wealth of affection she had given this man, again came upon her.

"I do love him so!" she sighed, as she thought of his handsome face and noble figure, and the memory of the book she had just cast aside recurred to her, and how the heroine had loved as she did—in vain, but by her strategy and

plottings had at last succeeded in winning her lover in spite of all.

"I love him so!" she muttered between her beautiful white teeth, as she again remembered how this same heroine had stopped at nothing—even when it came to committing a crime—to win the object of her love.

And the leaves rustled over her head, and the locusts hissed in the wood back of her, and the birds called to their mates while she thought and thought how to win this ideal of her heart over to her.

But the rustling of the leaves, the hissing of the locusts and the warbled notes of the birds could not tell her what she wished to know, and rising impatiently, she wandered off into the woods to be alone and think.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, after she had wandered about aimlessly for more than an hour, "why can't I find this woman? I can try at least, and I have heard that these Gipsies possess a potion which will win anybody's love."

She was thinking of the old Gipsy Queen, Vega, for she had often heard her uncle speak of an old woman who lived alone in a hut in the depths of the forest, and now it occurred to her that if she could find her, Vega might be able to help her out of her perplexity.

Suiting the action to the word, she wandered on and on, not knowing or caring where her footsteps took her, and trusting in chance only to take her steps to the old woman's hut.

Hours passed by and the sun began to sink to rest behind the tree-tops, and at last despairing of finding the hut, she turned to retrace her steps.

But which way should she go? where was the path that would lead her to Laurel Lodge?

There was no path, and she had no idea as to which way she should turn.

Everything looked the same; there was nothing she could see that would guide her, she was lost in the woods.

With a cry of horror came the full realization of her utter helplessness, and sobbing convulsively, she sunk upon a moss-covered stump, and gave herself up to bitter reflections.

"Oh, why did I not remain at the Lodge," she moaned. "Why did I wander out into the woods alone? Ralph! Uncle! come to me—hasten—I am lost—lost—lost!"

But her appeal for help only awakened an owl who had been sitting on a limb overhead, and who, uttering a dismal "h-o-o!" flapped his wings and flew away.

Darker, and darker grew the forest, and the mighty trees, stretching out their gaunt and giant arms, seemed to her fired imagination to be the fingers of a demon, who was seeking to devour her, while the flashing of the myriad of fire-flies appeared to her dilated vision, like the eyes of a thousand wild animals, watching her every movement, and only awaiting a more favorable opportunity to fall upon, and tear her to pieces. The dismal howl of a hungry wolf, far off in the depths of the forest, jarred upon her ears like the knell of a funeral bell, and with a wild, despairing cry of terror, she sprung to her feet, and rushed away through the darkness and the night, never heeding the thorny branches as they tore her garments from her, and scratched the velvety skin upon her face, neck and hands until the blood ran from the fresh wounds like little streams of liquid ruby from the surface of a pure white pearl.

Still she rushed on, now colliding with the drooping limb of a mighty tree, and starting back in horror, expecting a specter to spring forward and bear her away, but discovering her mistake she would again rush on, now falling to her hands and knees, and recovering herself, spring forward with increased speed, until at last, almost fainting from terror and fatigue, she ran out into the open space that surrounded the hut where Vega had lived and died, and within which, her cold and lifeless body was now sleeping the sleep that knows no waking.

Lady Lorna could not notice that all was still and quiet in and about the isolated cabin and that no light was visible to welcome her, and even if she had, so wrought up was she, so great was her terror that even the logs that formed the sides of the cabin were a comfort to her, for they said as plainly as words that the hand of man had been there.

But, without pausing to think of all these things, Lorna ran straight for the door and precipitated herself against it, and at the same time rapping and calling loudly to be allowed to enter, but the dark and dismal silence gave

back no sound, when again, nearly crazed with fright, she threw herself against the entrance.

There was a momentary yielding, a crash, a cloud of dust and cobwebs, and Lorna and the door fell to the floor inside of the hut together.

For a moment she was almost stunned by the fall, but, quickly recovering herself, she sprang to her feet and leaned against the jamb.

The moon, now risen, shone pale and ghostly through the open space, and the trembling, swaying of the leaves that came between it and the floor of sand, wrought weird and unearthly shaped goblins with its shadows, while the noises that always accompany the night seemed like hideous gibberings from a host of gabbling, laughing fiends.

"Is no one here to help me—no one to welcome me?" cried Lorna in despair, but the walls of the hut sent back a "—elcome me—e," as if in mockery.

"Oh, God!" she cried at last, for, now that her terror had become so great, she could call upon the great and all-seeing One, like a host of others, who, when the last resource fails, appeal at last to His gracious mercy and pity. "Oh, God, help me! Send me some one to comfort me or let me die."

But her senses once more began to come back to her, and murmuring, "If I could only get a light—surely there must be some token of life here, and at last I am free from those horrible woods."

So saying she began groping aimlessly about, in search of some means of striking a light, and after feeling cautiously around for some time, she came upon the last remains of the fire, where Gipsy Lorna had been boiling the herbs for her grandmother.

With a cry of joy she quickly bent over, and with her breath began to fan the dying embers into a blaze.

After several fruitless attempts, her exertions were at last rewarded, by seeing a tiny flame shoot suddenly up, and catching a dry twig that was lying at one side, soon a warm and ruddy blaze partially lighted the room.

But Lorna did not stop to look around, she was intent only on the fire, and a means of getting light and warmth, so she kept blowing and coaxing the now blazing embers, until from sheer dizziness, she had to desist.

Then she bent over, and taking some dry chips from the floor near the stove, she soon had a crackling, blazing fire, the comfort and warmth of which cheered her greatly.

Hers was not a cowardly spirit, nor one calculated to give way under trifling circumstances, and yet the events of the last few hours had so wrought upon her nerves, that the least additional excitement might bring about serious consequences.

At last she turned to look around her, not only to find a seat, but to learn something of the interior of her place of refuge.

"Why?" she exclaimed, as her eye fell upon the form of Vega lying at one side of the apartment. "Can it be that the old woman is sleeping, and all my noise has not awakened her? How still she lies; surely she must be indeed a sound sleeper not to have heard me long before this."

Poor girl! she did not know that a new horror, more dreadful than the first, awaited her; she did not know that the body stretched out there, and to all appearances asleep, was indeed but a body—a lifeless body; a worthless heap of moldering clay; that Vega, the old witch whom she had come to see, was no more, and only the cast-off refuse of a parting soul was there to welcome her.

She did not know this, and yet as she looked upon the form, so still and quiet, a cold chill went through her, and in spite of herself and the fire, her teeth chattered.

"I cannot be alone—I must waken her!" exclaimed Lorna, after regarding the lifeless body for a moment, "and who knows," she continued, her memory coming back to her, "but midnight may be the best time for her incantations, and I may indeed get the potion I want."

With a slightly faltering step, Lorna walked toward the body, intent upon arousing it from its slumbers, and she could not keep back the shivering dread of an unknown something which seemed to detain her.

Finally, having reached the side of the body, she put out her hand, grasped the arm and shook it vigorously, but she was met with a stiff resistance, and the arm felt like a block of ice, even through the sleeve that inclosed it.

Emitting a cry of horror and despair, for

Lorna now saw that she was alone with a dead body, she staggered back uttering cry after cry. For a moment she clasped the sides of the cabin for support, reeled, put her hand to her head, and then, as the full force of her horrible position rushed upon her, she fell crashing to the floor, just as the form of Baldo with two companions entered the place.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RAILROAD HORROR.

"EXTRA! Extra!! all about the escape of the counterfeiter from prison! Extra!"

The cry rung shrilly through the streets of Richmond on the morning after Ralph's escape from "Limbo," and reached the ears of pretty Lillian, who was sitting sadly by the window of her room.

She had hardly been herself since the death of her uncle, but she had not neglected to send a servant this same morning, to carry a message to Ralph, but he had returned with only the information that they would not let him see him, and had peremptorily told him to be off about his business, so of course Lillian knew nothing of Ralph's escape, and when the above inscribed cry rung into her ears, she dispatched a servant in feverish haste to procure a copy of the paper.

It was soon placed in her hands, and tremblingly she held it up to view.

"ESCAPED!"

And then followed the usual headings, and then a long and minute account of what had transpired.

Lillian perused the article to the end, now and then rereading this or that passage, but her eyes dilated with horror when the following paragraph met her eye:

"He probably would have gotten off entirely free, was it not for the good marksmanship, lately developed by some of our prison-guards, and this one in particular, Bernard Skroogs, showed himself to be particularly proficient. As the men were getting away nicely, Skroogs raised his rifle, and taking careful aim at the escaping prisoner, fired, and the man was seen to throw up his arms wildly, and fall crashing to the bottom of the boat. * * * It is fervently hoped that the guard's bullet did the desired work and that the public is well rid of a dangerous character, for the man's cool nerve was something wonderful," etc., etc.

For a long time Lillian sat perfectly still, regarding the printed columns before her, for she could not make it seem real, that so much of the serious could happen in so short a time. "It never rains but it pours," is an old and well-proven proverb, but fate, ever thoughtful, and time, that old king who makes all things eventually equal, have provided another, equally as old, and equally as well proven.

"It is a long lane that has no turning," is one that expresses itself, and even in the hour of her overwhelming grief, it occurred to Lillian.

"It cannot be that Ralph is dead," she said to herself in a low tone. "The Heavenly Father would not let so noble a being be shot down and killed in such a manner, and leave a stain that could never be washed from his name."

"No—no—no! Fate is too kind, destiny too solicitous, and Ralph too good and noble."

"I can hope still, and hope will give me patience."

She never thought to question the whys and wherefores of his escape; it never occurred to her that he could have stopped and proved his innocence.

In him her trust was absolute and she knew that whatever Ralph did, would be done because he thought it for the best, and she believed that what he thought was best, was best.

If some one had told Lillian that she loved Ralph, she would have been perfectly astounded, and yet she did, and did not know it.

Love was to her, in her innocence and modesty, something almost supernatural, sublime, only to be told of in books and dwelt upon in dreams.

For a long time she sat still, by the window, with her eyes fixed upon the pictures that her mind was conjuring up, lost in thought.

The funeral services of her uncle would be over before nightfall, and then—

6.30 P.M.

The services are over, and the body of the murdered man deposited in the vault.

Long investigations had been made by stupid detectives and police officers, but when the event of Ralph Gordon's escape startled the city from its peaceful quiet, they at once agreed that he—this escaped prisoner, this

noted Captain Ironnerve—was the guilty one, and in this belief settled down once more to their life of useful indolence.

Had Richmond possessed "The Finest," like New York, she could not have been humbugged into such a belief, and it is even safe to believe that a policeman would have been standing beneath the window through which the real murderer leaped, had the house in which the crime was committed stood in New York or Brooklyn.

To say that Lillian was disgusted when she knew of the decision of the officers, would be to express it too mildly. She, of course, knew that Ralph was innocent, but when the following note was put into her hands, her surprise and even anger knew no bounds:

"The murder of your uncle has excited some commotion among the police force, and the fact of Mr. Gordon's having been in your company aroused the suspicions of a number of blockhead members of the detective force. You are in momentary danger of being arrested as an accomplice, and if you'll take the advice of one who gives it for your own good, and who is determined to ferret out this crime, you will make yourself scarce until matters are a little more settled. I am a detective, and advise you to the best of my knowledge, trusting to you to destroy all evidence of this note, in either case."

"DICK PRINCE."

Nothing but the bare note left for her, and only signed by a name she had never heard of.

Should she do as this unknown friend (?) advised her? Should she fly from her home like a hunted animal, because the best friend she ever had had been foully murdered? Her pride revolted at such a proceeding, and yet the message stood out before her in bold relief, and she felt that not to do this man's bidding would be to frustrate him, in a measure, in his good intentions.

"Shall I do as he bids me?" she asked herself for the hundredth time, and the answer came to her in a still, small voice: "Yes!"

Ring the bell, she called one of the servants to her, whom she knew she could implicitly trust, and telling him she was going away for a time, and to preserve everything in running order, as she left it, she packed a small valise, provided herself with sufficient funds to keep her for a considerable time, betook herself to the station, and purchased a ticket for Washington.

She did not see a man standing in the shadow opposite when she left the house, and consequently, she could feel no surprise when this same person stepped up behind her, heard her call for her ticket, and when she had left the window, purchased one for the same place, and even when the train was boarded, he took the vacant seat immediately behind her.

For some time the train sped on in silence, save for the noise its own momentum gave it.

Half of the journey was finished, when the man, who seemed to be watching Lillian, arose, passed through the car, and returning, paused by her side and said:

"I beg your pardon, miss, but is this seat engaged?"

"No, sir; it is not," replied Lillian, not noticing that there was plenty of entirely empty seats in the car.

"May I occupy part of it?"

"Certainly, sir," and Lillian moved nearer the window to give him more room.

"Travel is very fine when one goes for pleasure," ventured the man, as he seated himself, "but when, like me for instance, you are obliged to go, it is not so enjoyable."

The remark was made in a careless, off-hand manner, but for an instant Lillian's face flushed up, but remembering that no one could possibly know who she was, or why she was going away, she merely said:

"No?"

"Humph!" muttered the man, in an inaudible aside. "She ain't so easy to swallow as I imagined."

"Do you travel far?" he asked, at length, while the train was rumbling over a bridge.

"To Washington only," replied Lillian, and then for the first time she looked at her talkative companion.

She could see only an old man, with laughing blue eyes, remarkably brilliant for his time in life. A long white beard almost hid his face from view, and the curly, snowy locks that fell upon his shoulders, from underneath the broad brim of a black slouch hat gave him a fatherly appearance, and she was in truth glad that chance had thrown such an appropriate companion in her way.

"Traveling alone?" came the next question. "Yes, sir, but I am accustomed to it."

The reply was rather precise in its tone, for Lillian was not sure that this man's age gave him the privilege of asking so many questions.

Again, for some time, the train rushed on, neither speaking nor addressing the other.

They approached a bridge that spans a deep gully, through which flows a shallow little stream.

There was a deafening crash, a thunderous roar, and the cars were piled on top of each other in a confused and shapeless mass. The steam could be heard escaping in a malignant hiss from the engine ahead of them, while the screams of the women and the hoarse shouts of the men, the crying of children who had been separated from their parents, the breaking of glass, as this or that passenger tried to free himself from the car which had now taken fire and was burning rapidly, all lent to the horror of the scene. Lillian was thrown forward on her face, and in the breaking up of seats and fixtures they were piled mercilessly on top of each other and her, and she lay there, utterly helpless, with the hissing, roaring fire momentarily drawing nearer and nearer.

CHAPTER IX.

YOU BET!

WHEN the sharp ping of the guard's rifle broke the stillness of the midnight air, and was closely followed by Ralph Gordon's throwing up his arms and falling to the bottom of the boat, his companions, noticing little and caring less for his welfare than for their own skins, rowed steadily onward, applying all their mighty strength to the one idea of getting the little craft out of the reach of the guards' bullets.

Not so Mosquito.

He had a good many dollars concerned in Ralph's preservation, and, besides, he had conceived a strong liking for his honest and upright manner.

Bending over him, the lad began looking searchingly for the wound as best he could in the dim light and the jerky, spasmodic motion of the boat.

At last his search was rewarded, for, opening the wounded man's vest and shirt, he could plainly feel the warm red blood upon his hand.

Diving into Ralph's coat-pocket, he brought forth a handkerchief—it is doubtful whether the lad ever had one himself—and quickly began to stanch the blood that was flowing freely from Gordon's right breast.

"Is he much hurt, 'Skeet?" asked one of the men. "Skroogs fired that shot I reckon, an' ye know he's right smart on the shoot."

"Yes," chimed in another, "I see'd him when he raised his gun, an' I thought he was aimin' at me, an' says I, Bolly, you're done fur, but he hit the Cap instead, an' I reckon I ain't feelin' very bad 'cause 'twasn't me, you bet!"

"I guess he's a goner," said Mosquito, in reply to the first question. "Pull down to the 'Dive' and we'll take a look at him."

The "Dive" was one of the city retreats of these men whom the reader has rightly conjectured were members of the gang of counterfeiters that infested the neighborhood, and was situated on the bank of the James, in one of the vilest parts of the city.

Here were ribuldry, profanity, obscenity, and all the vices that pertain to men of this stamp, and the place was guarded by such secrecy that it was next to a matter of complete impossibility of its existence ever being discovered except by the favored few.

Boats were put out from the prison, in the hope of overtaking the fugitives, but either they did not try very hard, or else the flying men were particularly expert at the oar, for all sounds of pursuit soon died out far behind them, and after a half-hour's steady pull, the little boat ran in under a dock, after one of the men had pulled on an apparently rusty old nail and the square logs that formed the pier seemed to open to receive them.

Quickly tying the boat after carefully closing the aperture behind them, the men took Ralph gently in their arms, and bore him through a long, damp passageway, opening and closing several doors with great care, and finally depositing him upon a sofa that stood in one corner of a comfortably furnished room.

"Now 'Skeet, you run for the Doc," said the man who had been spokesman all along, and whose name was Sam Crook, and the lad ran off excitedly, soon returning, accompanied by a man considerably under the 'middle age,' who stroked his brown beard thoughtfully as he regarded the man upon the sofa.

This was Doctor Ritch, a young physician who, lacking nothing of wealth, had conceived the charitable idea of locating in a poor quarter of the city, and doctoring those who were too poor to pay the average leech for their attentions.

As he will take quite a prominent part in the remainder of the story, his description is necessary. Of medium height, jet-black hair, dark-brown beard, open blue eye, kind and benevolent in his expression, square of the shoulders, deep of the chest, firm in his ideas, he was just the one who could wink at the villainy of humanity as long as he could alleviate their sufferings, and call it no sin.

Bending low over Ralph, he tore open the shirt and examined the wound that Bernard Skroogs's bullet had made.

Doubtfully he shook his head as he probed for the ball, which he found had entered the right breast, breaking one of the ribs as it entered, and passing upward and to the right, had finally lodged beneath the pit of the arm.

"Will he live, Doc?" asked Mosquito, whose anxiety was fast getting the better of him.

"It is somewhat doubtful," returned the doctor. "I have seen men live and entirely recover, after having received even worse wounds than this one, but such cases are exceptions; however, I will extract the bullet, and then if we can return him to consciousness, I may be able to save him."

"I reckon you're the chap as kin do it, if anybody kin," said Sam, decidedly, and the universal "You bet!" that followed, coming from everybody in the room, announced the doctor to be a great favorite among the motley crew.

"I hope there is no internal bleeding," murmured the doctor, as he bent low over his task.

After probing skillfully and for some time for the ball, he at last pulled it out, flat and misshapen, but no hemorrhage followed it, and the doctor, straightening himself up, said:

"Now if I can get him out of this stupor I may be able to save him," and he at once began applying restoratives, after carefully dressing the wound, and at last, after long trial, Ralph opened his eyes and looked around.

"Well, my man, how do you feel?" questioned Doctor Ritch, when he saw that success had crowned his efforts.

"Not very bad," said Ralph in a weak voice, and trying to smile.

"Where am I? How did I get here?" he asked after gazing wonderingly around the room for a time, and placing his hands upon the back of the couch—or rather his hand, for one arm was rendered almost useless—he essayed to rise.

"I brought ye here, Cap," cried Mosquito, "an' the Doc 'll cure ye, sure pop!"

"Yes, I think you will recover in time," said the doctor, gently holding him down.

"But you must keep quiet and follow my directions to the letter. It is an ugly wound, and must have great care."

"An—ugly—wound! Oh!"

He did not remember at first, what had brought him there, but now it all came to him, and closing his eyes, he said firmly:

"Doctor, I must get well, and will."

"That is right, my man. The will has considerable to do with it. Now try to sleep, and hope for the best."

"I will get well! I will recover!" muttered Ralph as he closed his eyes again, and Mosquito chimed in with his characteristic:

"You bet!"

CHAPTER X.

WHO IS WHO?

It will be remembered by the reader that we left the Lady Lorna in rather a precarious condition, she having fainted with horror just as Baldo, followed by several companions, entered the hut.

To say the "old man of the tree" was surprised at finding the cabin occupied by other than the dead body of Vega, would be but expressing the truth, but quickly springing forward, he raised her in his arms and examined her features.

"Crandy's ward, by all that's lucky!" he exclaimed, as the light of their torches fell upon her beautiful face.

"Quick, then!" he added to the men who accompanied him. "Some brandy!" and taking the proffered flask in his hand, he poured a few drops of the hot liquid between Lorna's half-parted lips.

This operation he repeated several times, rubbing her hands and forehead vigorously all the while, and he at length had the satisfaction of hearing a low sigh escape her, and seeing her open her eyes and gaze vacantly around.

But there was no intelligence in her glance, nothing but blank wonder and astonishment, and even rough, coarse Baldo shivered when he recognized the awful truth so plainly written upon her countenance.

Lady Lorna was mad.

The awful scenes she had passed through in the last few hours had shattered her nerves completely, and now the mind that was once so active, the intelligence that was once so quick, both were gone, and left in their place was only the mere body of the woman, governed and controlled by no will, and actuated by no desire but that which the eye and the ear encountered and the faint memory of things of the past left upon her.

She was a child again, without a thought and without a care. Her reasoning faculties were entirely gone, but part of her memory was left her.

After Vega's body had been committed to the earth, Baldo and his men constructed a rude litter out of some convenient saplings, placed Lorna upon it, and trudged away with her toward the Sighing Pine.

A wild, almost fleeting thought had occurred to Baldo when he at first discovered that the lady Lorna's mind was gone, and while they were busy in performing the last sad rites over the old woman's body, this thought had matured and grown in strength, until now he had almost settled upon it.

Baldo had seen Lady Lorna many times, but she had never seen him. He knew of the remarkable resemblance between the two Lornas—or Lorna and Lawrence—but, wiser than some other people, he knew the whole cause of it—who Lorna's father was and who Lawrence's father was.

Then why did he not use his knowledge?

What was he keeping it all to himself for?

You shall hear.

That Baldo was not what he pretended to be, the reader has no doubt already determined. In other words, Baldo was not Baldo at all, but a deep and scheming man, who chose to wear the garb of an old man, and, by bending his back, reduce his stature sequipedal, thus rendering his height little more than that of a mere boy.

And now, as he waddled along, somewhat in advance of his men, he was muttering to himself in an undertone, but, as we are favored, we will get close enough to hear what he is saying.

"Why isn't it possible?" he is saying. "Lawrence is entirely subservient to my will, and anything which I tell her is for the best, she will perform unhesitatingly."

"This one is certainly crazy and can know nothing of any change which comes to her, so if Lawrence can act her part entirely according to my instructions, there appears to be no reason why I should not succeed. I will make the attempt anyway."

They strode on in silence for some time and all the while Baldo was turning matters over in his mind, and laying his plans carefully, so that there could be no mistake, or nothing left undone.

Arrived at last at the Pine, the men were instructed to bear the Lady Lorna to the same room where Baldo had conducted the Gipsy girl but a short time before.

"You may go now," said Baldo to his colleagues, when the girl had been carried to the apartment. "It will be just as well for you to say nothing of what has happened to-night, and as a plaster to put over your tongues, you may divide this between you," and he handed them a well-filled purse.

The counterfeiters left the room, and Baldo approached Lady Lorna, who was lying on one of the sofas, the other being occupied by Lawrence, who was sleeping soundly.

"Well, Lawrence, do you know me?" he asked of the Lady Lorna, who lay gazing vacantly about her.

She turned her eyes upon him in a questioning manner and replied:

"I don't know you, and my name is not Lawrence, it is Ralph."

"Ralph, eh?" cried Baldo, rubbing his hands delightedly, for the cards seemed to be playing directly into his hands. "Don't you remember me? Try and think."

Lorna closed her eyes and contracted her

brows, as if trying to recall something, but at length, opening them again she shook her head.

"No, I do not remember you. Go away and leave me; I want to rest, I am so tired."

"All right, Ralph, go to sleep, if you wish," and he leaned forward and placed his hand upon her head, gently pressing it over her closed lids, and he smiled when he noticed that she almost immediately fell into a sound sleep.

He had mesmerized her.

Going over to where Lawrence was sleeping, he roused her, telling her he had something of importance for her to do, and when she had fully awakened, he pointed to Lorna, and asked if she had ever seen that face before.

The girl-boy shook her head a little, then going to the mirror, she gazed first at the reflection of herself therein, and then at the sleeping woman, when, turning to Baldo with a mystified look in her pretty eyes, she said:

"Why! she looks like me, only my hair is short."

"Exactly! and I want you to personate her."

"To what?"

"To personate her; take back your old name of Lorna, but instead of becoming Gipsy Lorna again, you will be Lady Lorna Atherton, and live at Laurel Lodge."

"I do not understand," said Lawrence, rather mystified at Baldo's words.

"I will explain more understandingly to you presently, but now I am going to leave the room for a time, and while I am gone I want you to change garments with that lady."

"Make an entire change, even to underclothes."

"But suppose she won't change?"

"She will change with you; I'll fix that," and going up to the sleeping one, he made a few passes over her throat, at the same time speaking to her in a low tone.

"I am going away for a few moments," he was saying; "and while I am gone I want you to take off the clothes you have on, and put on the ones which will be handed you."

He backed toward the door, keeping his eyes upon her until he had closed it between them, when the Lady Lorna, as if obeying some unseen power, slowly arose to her feet and began divesting herself of her garments.

Lawrence was not slow in doing the same, and when this operation was finished, she handed her "Lawrence" garb to Lady Lorna, who took them and began putting them on at once.

Lawrence stood for a moment regarding the fine apparel which she was to don, for her eyes had never before beheld anything half so beautiful, but recovering, she hastened to array herself in the "borrowed plumes," not forgetting to remove the portrait she had found to the pocket of her new costume.

In a short time the exchange was completed, and then Lady Lorna returned to her couch, and "Lawrence" poised herself gracefully before the mirror and gazed upon the transformation with looks of mingled astonishment and pleasure.

Baldo soon came in, but stopped in the middle of the room and looked at first one and then the other.

"If I didn't know which one was on that couch, I'm blessed if I could tell whether any change had taken place or not," he muttered, half to himself.

Lawrence left the glass when he entered, and going up to him, said:

"Don't I look nice, Baldo? It's too bad, though, that this pretty dress is awfully torn in some places, but if I had a needle, I could soon mend it."

Vega had not neglected to teach her child the use of the needle, and her knowledge of the mysteries of fancy-work would soon stand her in good stead.

"Never mind the needle or the rents," said Baldo; "you will have some one to do such work for you now."

"Sit down; I want to give you some instructions."

Baldo had rightly conjectured that Lady Lorna had been lost in the woods, and was certain that a diligent search would be made for her by the owner of Laurel Lodge, and had laid his plans accordingly.

"I will take you out into the woods," he said, after thinking a moment, "and you will wander about, aimlessly, for some time, but all the while working in the direction that will take you near to Laurel Lodge. You know

where it is located, although you have never been there, do you not?"

"Oh, yes! I was there once."

"You were? when?"

"One day when I was roaming about the forest. But nobody saw me."

"I'm glad of that," said Baldo, in a relieved tone, and then continued:

"In your hands you will have a pair of lady's scissors, and the hair I cut from your head the other day."

"You will also be softly singing some song to yourself, and when anybody meets you, you must appear not to know them,—as indeed you will not—but if you are asked to accompany him, you must do so."

"He will take you to Laurel Lodge, and hand you over to a maid who will undress you and put you to bed. This you must allow her to do."

"Strangers will probably stand around you, and you will hear anxious whispering going on about you but to these you must pay no attention, but keep continually humming the same tune in the same low tone."

"You will have to take bitter powders, in all probability, but you must take them without a murmur."

"At last you will be declared well enough to get up, when this same maid will dress you."

"Wander around, not recognizing anybody or anything but at the same time being surprised at nothing, until you hear from me again, when I will tell you what you are to do next. Have you understood me?"

"Yes; but why am I to do this? Why can I not remain here with you, when I am happy?"

"Because, Lorna—your name will be Lorna again—it is for your good to do as I wish you to in this, and some day you will thank me for it."

"What is to become of that lady?" she asked pointing toward Lorna Atherton, who was lying like one dead, upon the couch.

"I will take good care of her; she will not suffer through the change, and you know my child, it is perfectly right, for you are obeying Vega's instructions. Now are you ready? because we must start at once."

"I am ready," replied Lorna, taking up the sun-hat that the sleeping one had worn.

They were about to leave the room when Baldo stopped her, and after removing the earrings, bracelets, and watch from Lorna Atherton's body—for she had retained them when she made the change—he told his companion to put them on, and together they left the apartment.

For some distance they proceeded along through the woods in silence, until finally Baldo came to a halt.

"This is as far as I dare accompany you," he said. "Do you remember all the instructions I have given you, and will you follow them out implicitly?"

"I remember," she replied.

"Very well," said the old man, placing the pair of scissors in her hand. "Now don't forget a word I have said to you, and remember that your safety depends upon your success in obeying me."

With that he left her.

For some time Lorna stood still and thought.

The events of the last few days had brought so many changes to her that she had ceased to be surprised at anything, and she was resolved to carry out her benefactor's instructions.

Determined in this, she commenced humming a wild, weird Gipsy air, and wandered on through the woods.

Oh, what a difficult task she had undertaken, but her very ignorance would assist her.

CHAPTER XI.

DICK PRINCE.

To say that Lillian Leonard was left in a dangerous predicament would be to recall the reader's mind to the fearful railway accident that happened to the train on which she was a passenger, bound for Washington.

She was almost unhurt, but the shock and jar had nearly deprived her of consciousness, although she still had sense enough to know that she was in great danger, for the crackling, roaring of the flames, and the smell of the smoke, was borne to her by the fierce draught that was drawing through the burning car.

But she was helpless.

Seats were piled, heap on heap, over and on every side of her, although the position in

which she was lying prevented them from resting heavily upon her.

Voices could be heard above the roaring of the flames—voices of humane men, who, having freed themselves, were now trying to succor those who still remained within the wreck.

Would they reach her in time?

Place yourself in the same position, reader, and then imagine with what anxiety you would wait for help to come.

She could not see any thing but the seats that were piled up about her, and hence she did not know how eagerly death was reaching out for her, helpless as she was.

Slowly, but surely the fire was momentarily drawing nearer and nearer, and at last she could feel the hot air as it tanned her cheek, and made the air difficult for her to breathe.

"Help—help!" she cried frantically; but the workers were all engaged amid the ruins of the car in front of the one in which she had been a passenger, and could not hear her shouts.

"Help—HELP!" she cried again, as the crackling and hissing of the flames sounded nearer and the air she was inhaling grew denser, warmer, and more laden with suffocating smoke; but the shouts of the men; the cries of the women who had lost a husband; the wailing of the children who missed a loved father or mother from their sides, all helped to call the attention of the workers in another direction.

And the fire was nearer still.

"Help! Oh, God help me!" she wailed in the agony of despair, as she caught sight of a tongue of flame as it shot into the car, not fifteen feet away.

There was a crashing noise on the side of the car, over her head, as axes were being driven into the yielding wood by strong arms and iron muscles.

"Oh help! make haste!" she called out again when the welcome sound fell upon her ears and she could hear the blows as they fell, as if applied by redoubled efforts.

Crash!

A piece of the siding of the car is loose and has fallen upon the heap, underneath which Lillian is lying.

Crash!

Another piece is added to it, and a voice exclaims:

"Keep up your courage, we will be to you soon."

Crash—crash!

"Now quick with that grappling," shouts a masculine voice in a harsh, gruff tone, but oh, how sweet and musical it sounds to Lillian as she lies there helpless.

She can hear a noise as if something is dragged from the pile upon her, and the voice calls out:

"Courage—have courage—we will be to you soon," and then she hears the sound of violent hissing, as bucket after bucket of water is dashed upon the flames, which are now sending out a heat which almost scorches her.

Another obstruction is pulled away, and she can again detect the sound of the grappling being lowered, and then she hears it as they pull it up, laden with pieces of the wreck.

Still another!

She can see through the pile of confusion now, and her eyes encounter the forms of the men at work above her, some dashing water upon the fire and others working with might and main to remove the obstacles that stand between her and liberty.

She feels that they must be quick or they will be too late, but she keeps up her courage wonderfully, and at last has the satisfaction of seeing the last piece of obstruction thrown aside by a man who has leaped down to her more immediate assistance.

She feels strong arms lift her from her uncomfortable position and then she knows no more.

Her courage held out to the last, but when she saw that she was safe, the reaction was so great that she fainted.

Help had come to her just in time, for they had hardly got her outside the car, when little tongues of burning flame began to shoot in and out, and all around the very place in which she had been lying.

She was carried to a grassy spot where dozens were lying, some but slightly injured, and others in the last throes of death were groaning and calling aloud for some one to, in mercy, kill them.

One poor woman, whose head and face was terribly burned, was sitting underneath a tree,

rocking to and fro in her agony, and tightly clasping in her arms the dead body of a babe, whose spirit had flown in time to save it from the intense agony of burning.

Another; a young lad, twelve or thirteen years of age, whose legs were horribly mashed and whose hands and arms were eaten by the flames in a frightful manner, was lying on his back, looking up into his mother's face—who, unhurt, was bending over him—showing no sign of the racking pain and intense suffering he was so bravely bearing, but in a calm though weak voice, telling her not to cry.

"It is God's will, mamma darling," he said. "See, I am not suffering much, only waiting patiently for death to come and bear me away. I would be glad to go, mamma, if it was not for leaving you and Alfred alone. But it is—best. Good—b-by—mam—ma—God—"

He was dead.

In the midst of all this suffering, Lillian's consciousness returned, and as soon as her strength came back to her, she was up and administering what comfort she could to those who needed it.

"Will you tell my wife for me? Break it gently to her. Tell her I did not suffer," said one young man who gave her the street and number of his abode in the nation's capital, and she promised to perform this sad duty for him.

News had been telegraphed ahead, and after a time that seemed thrice long to those who were suffering, a train bearing doctors and nurses arrived, and after lading it they steamed away toward Alexandria.

But what had become of Lillian's companion all this time?

She had not seen him since the first shock of the accident, but when they disembarked at Washington, she felt a hand laid on her arm and turning, beheld him before her.

"I was afraid you were killed," he said. "I have been searching for you ever since the crash, but could find you nowhere."

"I had a narrow escape," replied Lillian, "but happily I am uninjured, and am glad to know you are also."

"Where are you going now?" asked the man after he had acknowledged her speech.

"To the St. James for my breakfast."

"Have you any objections to my accompanying you? I have some things of importance to say, which you will understand better when I admit that I am the author of the note you received from one Dick Prince."

"Are you Dick Prince?"

"I am."

"Then come with me, for I want to talk to you as well."

Prince hailed a cab, and they were soon driven to the St. James Hotel, where we will leave them, and return to Lorna.

CHAPTER XII.

A MYSTERY.

LORNA wandered on for some distance, idly pausing now and then to pick some wild flower that caught her eye, and placing them in fantastical positions about her person, all the while humming the same wild Gypsy air, and indeed forgetting for the moment that she was playing a part.

She had wandered on in this manner for some time when she heard a crashing in the bushes ahead of her, and realizing that it must be some one in search of the missing Lorna, she seated herself upon a moss-covered log and began weaving some of the flowers in the loose hair she held in her hand.

The bushes parted, and one of the servants came through them, and discovering Lorna seated upon the log, immediately went toward her.

"My lady," he said, but Lorna did not look up or appear to hear him, so intent did she appear to be with her flowers.

"My lady—Miss Lorna!"

Then Lorna looked up questioningly, and after regarding the man curiously for a moment, said:

"Go away! Leave me to my flowers."

"But, my lady—"

"Go away!"

"But you must come with me."

"What for?" asked Lorna, in a curious tone, and looking questioningly into his eyes.

"Because your uncle wants you, and has been worrying about you all night."

"My uncle! uncle who?"

"Your uncle Gordon."

"Uncle Gordon—uncle Gordon," she mused. "What does he want?"

"He wants you to come home. Come!" he added, in an authoritative tone, for he began to dimly comprehend the fact that she had lost her mind.

"I—I don't want to go," she sobbed. "Why can't you let me stay here among the flowers and birds? I am so happy here—so happy," she said.

She was playing her part well, this unsophisticated child of chance, and all the better for her ignorance of the purpose in view and the wrong she was doing the other Lorna, whom she had left in the cave with Baldo.

The man stepped forward and laid his hand upon her arm, at the same time telling her that she must come with him.

She arose obediently, and he led her through the bushes to a narrow path, and, following this, after a lengthy walk they came out into the clearing that surrounds Laurel Lodge.

Great was the rejoicing among the few guests and the servants when it was made known that the lady Lorna had been found.

She was immediately handed over to the tender mercies of Lorna Atherton's maid, and, true to Baldo's conjectures, she was conducted immediately to her room, where she was at once disrobed and put to bed.

Anxiously they crowded around her to learn as much as possible of what had happened, but she kept persistently humming the same tune, and all the efforts of the maid to coax the garland of hair and flowers from her were unavailing.

Gordon Crandyl made his appearance soon, for horns had been sounded to recall the searchers from the forest, but of course she did not know him, and, when he bent over her and tried to make her recognize him, she only shook her head and stared, as if she did not comprehend one word that was said to her, and after a short pause would again relapse into her monotonous song, now and then twirling the garland about in front of her and gazing at it as a connoisseur might have done at some work of art.

The awful truth began to make itself cognizant to those assembled, and the servant, John, was dispatched for a doctor on the back of the fleetest horse that Crandyl had in his stable, then all left the room but the maid and Gordon Crandyl, who, in spite of his natural villainy, still loved his ward devotedly.

Hours passed, and at last the doctor's professional cough could be heard outside of the door, and he entered and examined his patient carefully.

"Temporary insanity, probably resulting from a severe fright," was his verdict, and after prescribing and recommending perfect quiet and rest for a few days, he took his leave.

Thus Lorna, the Gypsy, had become Lady Lorna Atherton.

But how would it all end?

Lorna, in the innocent ignorance of her child-like nature, did not think to ask.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ESCAPE.

SEVERAL days dragged themselves slowly by and at last Ralph Gordon was pronounced by Doctor Ritch to be far enough recovered to sit in a chair, and occasionally walk feebly about the room in which the wound had confounded him; and ere three weeks had passed away into the irredeemable past, he was well enough to walk about, and even to occasionally—after dark—have Mosquito row him about the river; so that he might obtain the benefits that fresh air always gives an invalid.

One night when they were pulling about in their boat, the following conversation took place.

"I say, Cap!" said Mosquito suddenly, after a long silence, during which to all appearances, they had both been studying the beauties of the moonlit garb of nature. "Ain't ye most well enough to get outen this now? I don't want to hurry you away, but don't ye forget that there's a cool thousand comin' ter me when ye get ready to hand it over."

"I won't forget it, my boy; never fear," replied Ralph, smiling a little at the other's quaint way of expressing himself.

"What are ye waitin' fur, anyway?" asked Mosquito, after another pause.

"I'll tell you, my lad. Do you remember a note I gave you to mail as soon as I was able to write?"

"Yes, I ain't forgot it."

"Well, I am waiting for a reply to that note,

and when it comes, I will be ready to take my departure, and to take you along with me."

"Whar ye goin'?"

"I have not exactly determined as yet, but I will let you know in good time."

"All right, Cap. I'll depend on ye," said the lad with the air of a man who had lived and studied human nature for years. "Ye look honest, an' I guess ye air."

"Thank you," replied Ralph dryly, and rather amused at the boy's nonchalance.

"Hist!" exclaimed Mosquito suddenly, and in a peculiar whisper that always carries force with it. "Lay low, Cap. There's some o' the river cops spyin' around and they might recognize us."

It may strike the reader as rather funny that such a thoroughly organized gang as the one which had offered Ralph shelter, should allow him so much liberty, but it must be remembered that he was an escaped prisoner, who could do them no injury without committing himself, and besides, whenever Ralph spoke there was a ring of truth in his voice as well as a glance in his eyes that carried conviction with what he said.

That he had been allowed to roam about at will since his wound had been in a condition to allow him to, was only proof that the men who had him in charge did not fear him in the least, but rather expected him to fear them.

When the low warning of the lad told Ralph that he must be cautious, he gave a quick glance around, and much to his annoyance and surprise, he saw about two hundred feet from him a police boat, and to add to his concern it was pulling quickly toward them.

"Have you got a pop, Cap?" asked Mosquito.

"I have."

"Ye'd better have it ready 'cos ye may have to use it. Ye know ef we was caught now—csk!" and the lad drew his finger across his throat in a meaning way that spoke volumes.

"I am rather weak as yet," said Ralph in a tone indicating an iron resolution, "but I fancy 'twould be no easy matter to handle me if I had my liberty to fight for."

"Bully fur you!" cried the boy. "I allers said ye was a brick, and 'Sk. et can fight sum if he's gotter."

Meantime the boat containing the minions of the law was drawing steadily nearer and nearer, and although our two friends had been trying to pull away from the other boat without attracting attention, the policeman had evidently caught sight of them and resolved to discover for what reason they were roving idly about the river at that hour of the night.

"There's no help for it, my lad; we must pull for it," exclaimed Ralph at last, when he saw that the officers were bent upon overhauling them, and the elder man changed his seat, and taking a pair of oars in his hands he applied his weakened muscles to them and together they sent the light boat spinning rapidly over the glancing wavelets.

The occupants of the police boat were quick to discover that our two friends were trying to escape, and they redoubled their exertions to overtake them.

"I did not think I had so much strength," muttered Ralph to himself as he forced the thin blades into the muddy water of the James, and then threw the weight of his body in the stroke to assist his arms all he could. "I am afraid it will not hold out long," he continued after a pause, for already the exertion was beginning to tell upon him, and he knew that unless some unlooked-for assistance arrived, their game would be U. P.

The police boat was gaining upon them rapidly, and presently a ringing shout came from the pursuing party.

"Halt!" came the voice, but both Ralph and his companion remained silent, and only rowed the faster.

"Halt or I'll fire!"

No answer. Only redoubled exertions from the two who were trying to escape.

Ping!

A bullet whistled harmlessly over their heads.

"Fire lower," said a voice in the police boat.

"That shot was over their heads."

Ping!

A bullet struck the oar in Mosquito's hand, and glanced, whistling away.

"Will you stop?"

"No!"

Ralph sent back the reply in a fierce tone, for the events of the last few weeks were beginning to harden his usually easy nature, and

to make him feel toward the minions of the law almost as much enmity as the counterfeiters themselves.

"No!" he cried, and the meaning which those two letters convey was never more forcibly expressed.

Ping! ping—ping!

The bullets whistled harmlessly around the man and boy, some flying over their heads, others throwing little jets of spray against the side of their flying boat, and still others imbedding themselves in its side.

Still they rowed on unharmed.

Great beads of perspiration were standing out on Ralph's brow, and his breath was coming in short, quick gasps, that told conclusively how the hard rowing was telling upon him.

Escape seemed almost impossible, and yet, while he had a particle of strength left to battle for his liberty, he was firmly resolved not to give it up.

"Better to kill myself in this way, than to be again locked up in Richmond prison," he thought, and that thought took the form of resolution.

Escape he must, and if he found that to be impossible, there was always left—the river.

He did not know how hard a death to die is drowning when the victim is versed in the science of swimming, nor would he have hesitated if he had, for well he knew what awaited him if taken. The prison cell, and then—death, a living death; a life spent between four walls, and in drudgery. No—no—no! better anything than that, and the thought lent strength to his arms.

Another volley from the revolvers of the men in pursuit, and a faint exclamation from Mosquito.

"I'm hit, Cap."

"Badly?"

"Where I sit, but I guess I'm only grazed."

Ralph could not repress a smile, in spite of the calamity the news might hasten.

"Can you hold out a little longer?"

"You bet I kin."

"There's a schooner just ahead of us, and if we can get around that before they overtake us, we may escape."

"We'll git around her, Cap, ef that's all we've got to do. Quicken yer stroke a little."

The stroke was quickened, and the gallant little vessel shot through the water like a thing of life, bounding on and on, from wave to wave, with the bullets whistling over their heads and dashing little jets of spray upon them from before and behind, as well as the sides.

Now and then a ball would strike one of the oars, but with the exception of Mosquito's slight wound, there seemed to be a special providence watching over the fugitives, turning the missiles aside that were hurled at their hearts' blood.

On and on they go. The schooner is nearly reached, and what was a few moments ago a dark and shapeless mass looming out of the river, has grown into a recognized vessel, which Ralph's quick eyes had singled out when they were some distance away.

Ping—ping—ping—g—g! sound the reports of the firearms in their rear, and Ralph feels a sharp pain in his side, but still he rows. He knows the ball has struck him, but he also knows it is not serious, and again he throws all his strength in the effort to escape.

"Kim on, ye bloody beasts!" cries the boy, for the excitement has made him forget the danger that menaces them, and he only knows that a race is going on, of which he is one of the principals, and he is bound to win.

Will he?

Can these two—one a boy, and the other, though a strong man usually, now weakened by illness—can they hope to escape from the strong arms of the officers, whose muscles are hardened by exposure, and who know that a reward awaits them if they capture these men?

Ralph does not stop to ask himself if he can escape. His mind is firmly made up that he will, and resolution always lends force and power to a man like him.

The pursuing boat is much nearer now, and the men in it have stopped firing, for they want to take their prisoners alive if possible, and they have gained so rapidly in the last few minutes that it now seems to them to be beyond the question of doubt.

For the last few minutes Ralph and Mosquito have not spoken. They feel that they need all

their breath in the fight for liberty, and it is far too precious a thing to throw away.

The men in the police boat see them row around the stern of the schooner, and then they are lost to view.

"Pull!" shouts the man in the stern, throwing his body forward with each stroke, to help speed the boat along.

"Pull! curse them! They have gone around that schooner," and the swish of their oars falls rapidly upon the midnight air.

They reach the stern of the vessel and row under it, expecting to see the little boat containing the two fugitives flying on beyond it in vain endeavors to escape.

But they are mistaken. No boat is in sight, and for a moment they rub their eyes in perplexity.

"Quick—to the other side!" cried the leader. "They are dodging us!" but the other side is as empty as the one first visited.

What has become of them?

The officers row backward and forward, peering vainly into the gloom for signs of their prey, but nothing is to be seen of them, and after hailing the schooner, and asking fruitlessly if anything has been seen, of a boat with two occupants in the last five minutes, they silently row away.

Ralph and Mosquito have escaped. But how?

Events, as they transpire, will develop this mystery.

CHAPTER XIV.

LILLIAN.

We left Lillian in the company of Dick Prince, and willing to trust everything to him, to get her out of her fancied trouble.

As soon as it was possible, they were closeted together, laying plans for her safety, and freedom from her complicity with Ralph Gordon, in the murder of Paul Leonard.

It was well known to Prince that her uncle Paul had left a goodly fortune, all of which would fall to Lillian, when the lawyers had straightened up the estate and got it into a fit condition to distribute according to the old man's will.

This "straightening up" of estates by the lawyers, generally means getting all they can out of it, and then passing over what is left to the heirs.

Lillian knew that she would be beyond want, but she did not know that the fortune left to her, was as large as it really was, and that once she came into possession, she would be very rich.

Somehow, this man's note had given her confidence in him and she resolved to trust everything into his hands, for she was innocent of the knavery of the world, and did not know that the smoothest and oiliest natures sometimes hide the deepest defects.

"I suppose, Miss Leonard, that you are aware that you come into quite a little fortune," said Prince, when they were alone together.

"I suppose uncle Paul left me something," she said. "But then, you know, he was not very rich."

Prince does not know any such thing, but then, he does not say so for this would not be playing his cards as he had determined.

It may be added here, that there was nothing maliciously wicked or villainous about Dick Prince, and yet he was one of those characters which we often meet with, whose bump of self-esteem has become so largely developed by continual indulgence, that it swallows up all the better nature of a man and makes him commit enormities which he otherwise would never think of.

So it was with Prince.

The note which Lillian had first received from him had been penned in a moment of deep and bitter plotting, and when everything about him seemed to be changed into opposing elements, and debts were coming in upon him far too numerous for him to meet.

His attention had been called to the events of the murder of Paul Leonard, and after a little research he had discovered that by conducting himself in what he called the "right way," he could at length become possessed of all of the murdered man's wealth.

It is needless to say that Lillian Leonard, as an accomplice in the dreadful crime, had never once been thought of, or, if she had, the thought had been dismissed almost as soon as it came,

and so we find her in Washington, having flown from a foe that had not thought of pursuing her, and which was, in reality, no foe at all, but only a chimera of Dick Prince's raising.

"What do you intend to do?" asked Prince at length, after carefully regarding his companion for some little time.

"I hardly know," she replied. "I have been in such a state of confusion ever since my uncle's horrible death, that I scarcely know which way to turn."

Two great tears hovered for a moment on the fringe of her eyes as she spoke, and then rolled softly, gently downward.

"Have you heard aught of Ralph Gordon since his escape?" was the next question he asked, and for one brief moment she doubted him; but the doubt quickly fled, and she answered him frankly:

"I have not," she said. "Oh, if I only could know what has become of him. You know he was reported shot by one of the prison guards, but I did not and do not believe it."

She hesitated for a moment, and her hands were locked tightly together as she went on:

"That something has happened to him, I am certain, or he would have found a way to communicate with me before this."

"Oh, Ralph, Ralph! where are you?" she cried, as the full force of his suffering came up before her mind's eye, and Dick Prince seated there before her, bit his lip impatiently, for the exclamation told him that she loved this fugitive from the law.

"Curse the luck!" he mutters in his heart. "If she's in love with this fellow, how am I to win her? Something must be done."

His motive, when he first made up his mind to act, had been naught but his desire for money—for gold, with which to pay his debts, but already her brilliant eyes had done their work and he felt that in the last few hours, this girl had become very dear to him.

He loved her.

But his love was that mad, idolatrous passion which springs up in the breast of natures such as his, spontaneously, and burns for a time, furiously, but the blaze is so fierce, that it destroys all the good that's in the victim's heart, making it desirous to achieve only its own selfish ends, to the confusion of anything and everything that opposes.

In those few moments in which he had been sitting there before her, gazing into her beautiful face, he had discovered the sequel to his impulsive adventure, and the one desire which now consumed his very soul, was to make this girl woman his wife.

True, that had been his first intention, but it had only been prompted by a mad desire for gain, and now—he loved her!

Quick to think, and quicker to act, he decided at once to find out the truth regarding Ralph Gordon.

He must know whether he is alive or dead, in order to see his own way clear, but alive or dead, he has resolved that Lillian Leonard must become Mrs. Dick Prince.

"Will you let me advise you?" he finally asked, leaning a little forward and gazing straight into her eyes.

"If you only would!" Lillian exclaimed, for she thought she had discovered a true friend in this man.

There was a short hiatus, and then he leaned forward and said:

"You had better remain here for the present; at least until I can discover something definite in regard to Gordon."

"I put your name on the register, as Mrs. Lord, thinking that you had best not be known by your right name at present, so try and remember, that for a time Miss Leonard is no more."

"Good-by, for the present," he added, rising to his feet, and extending his hand.

"Are you going so soon?" asked Lillian, rising also and extending hers.

"Yes, I am going to start now, on the search for your friend. We must not lose any time."

"God bless and speed you!" cried Lillian, and he winced a little for he knew that he was false.

He had never been troubled with twinges of conscience before, but somehow, with this pure and innocent creature before him he could not help but feel his utter insignificance, for he knew that she was good to the core.

Shaking her hand, he left her, and she sunk back in a chair to pray for his success, not knowing that it would make her suffer.

CHAPTER XV.

A DANGEROUS RISK.

WE left Gipsy Lorna, in the character of Lorna Atherton, supposed to be suffering from temporary aberration of mind.

That Baldo's plans had worked splendidly, the reader already knows, and this wild Gipsy girl was installed as descendant of an old aristocratic family of England, and mistress of Laurel Lodge.

But would she be able to keep up the farce?

When the madness—which did not possess her—began to wear off, could she step into the shoes of Lorna Atherton so completely that even Gordon Crandyl would not ferret out the deception?

The day came at last when she felt that she must lay aside the apparent madness, and strangely enough, that very morning a note was slipped into her hand by one of the lower servants of the household.

It was penned in the Romany dialect, and told her that she must begin to get better, as too much cooking always spoiled a dinner, and was from Baldo.

Lorna was not as illiterate as one would suppose her to be, having been reared as she had, but her knowledge was certainly limited, and when compared to the one whose place she was usurping, it was as nothing.

Lady Lorna had been very fond of her French novels, while Gipsy Lorna did not know any more of French than she did of Choctaw, and consequently, when one of what was supposed to be her favorite works was put into her hand, she merely glanced at it and put it aside. But she had scarcely done so, when she realized that she was playing a part, and that she must at least keep up appearances.

Accordingly, for a long time she sat and idly turned over the leaves, as if reading, until at last, tired and more than a little disgusted, she threw it aside.

The day passed away without anything particular happening to break the monotony, and when, in the evening, she was sitting in her boudoir, Gordon Crandyl came into the room, she knew that the hour of trial had come.

"Well Lorna," he said, as he pulled a chair up to her side. "How do you feel to-night?"

"Very well," she replied shortly enough.

"Are you tired?" was his next question.

"No."

"Do you feel like talking?"

"No."

"But I want you to tell me what happened to you the night you were lost in the woods."

This was a poser.

She knew she must reply to his question, and yet, what should she say?

"How came you to get lost?" asked Crandyl again.

"I went into the woods for a walk," she said.

"True," replied Crandyl, "but you have been here long enough to know the paths in the vicinity of the house."

"But I went beyond the vicinity of the house," said Lorna.

"Still you should have known the way back," persisted the man.

"But I did not. If I had, I would not have been lost."

"Who cut your hair for you?"

"I don't know how it was cut," said Lorna, and she saw that she must invent some story immediately or she would have some question put to her to which she could not reply.

"I was reading," she said for a venture, and as the reader knows, she happened to hit the right mark there, "and it occurred to me that a walk in the woods would be pleasant, and so I started off."

"I must have wandered a very long way from home, for when I turned to retrace my steps, I did not know which way to go."

"I remember its getting very, very dark, and of wandering about aimlessly for a long time, and after that all is blank until I found myself in my own bed."

"But your hair!"

"I don't know anything about my hair, uncle. I wish you would not question me just yet. Let me think for a day or two, and it may all come back to me."

"Well, child," said Crandyl, rising, "I will not bother you any more to-night, but you had better go to bed immediately, and get a good night's rest," and he left the room.

For some time after he had gone, Lorna sat still thinking.

It was the first time she had really given any thought to the part she was acting, and now she asked herself, why Baldo wanted her there.

"I wonder if I am doing wrong?" she murmured, half to herself.

She could hear the hooting of an owl, far off in the woods, and now and then the shrill cry of some night bird as it sped by the house, mingled with the bark of a wolf, back on the mountains.

The little clock on the mantle chimed the hour of twelve, and still she sat there.

The maid had come in an hour before to perform her nightly offices, but had been sent to bed, and much to her delight.

The echo of the silvery gong of the clock had scarcely died away, when a sharp ping came at the window, and Lorna, emitting a faint cry of alarm sprung to her feet, and stood, panting and wondering.

Clip! The sound came again, and this time she saw that some light missile had been thrown against the pane, and she moved quickly to the window and peered out into the night.

The moon was shining brightly, throwing a silvery halo over all nature, and she lifted the sash and looked out.

"Lorna!" she heard a voice say, and she instantly recognized it as Baldo's.

"Well?" and she leaned forward a little, peering down into the shadow beneath her.

"It is me—Baldo; I want to speak to you."

"I am listening."

"But I must come nearer. Some one will hear me if I talk from here."

"This vine is very strong," said Lorna, laying her hand upon a massive wisteria that almost covered that side of the house.

Baldo did not hesitate, but grasped the vine in a firm hold, and commenced the ascent.

She knew he was coming, and threw herself into the same easy-chair, leaned her head back, and closed her eyes.

She did not hear the door of her room open softly, and did not know that Gordon Crandyl had entered!

"The window wide open, and Lorna asleep in her chair!" he muttered, and started over to close it, placing his hand upon the sash just as Baldo raised his head and looked into the room.

CHAPTER XVI.

JIM MUNGER AGAIN.

To say that it was a mutual surprise party for both Baldo and Crandyl, when they discovered themselves face to face with each other at Lorna's window, would be but putting it mildly, the one expecting to look into the girl's eyes as he raised himself over the sill, and the other intent only upon closing the sash.

For fully half a minute they stared at each other's faces, and then, before Gordon Crandyl had fairly come to his senses, Baldo loosened his hold upon the vine, and quickly dropped down and out of sight.

But none too quick, for with a cry of surprise and rage, the man in the room sprung through the window after him.

As soon as Crandyl struck the ground he remained perfectly quiet, and listened, fully expecting to hear the footsteps of the supposed burglar, and knowing that in such an event he might easily tell what course to pursue, but not a sound smote his ear; everything was as quiet as the grave, except for the noises that always accompany the night.

"He's a cute one, at least!" muttered Crandyl, as he listened for a sound he could not hear. "I do not believe he has gotten very far away, for I followed him so closely I should have heard him as he ran. I think I'll get out the dogs and see if they cannot root him out of his hiding-place."

As he strode away, a form that had been lying prone upon the ground just by the roots of the wisteria sprang quickly up and shook its fist at the departing man.

"Get out the dogs, will you?" said Baldo, for he it was. "I think I can just spoil your little game in that direction," and, taking two enormous leaps for so old and bent a man, he quickly retraced his steps backward to the wisteria, and once more commenced the ascent.

Hastily clambering into the room, he found Lorna sitting in the chair where Crandyl had seen her.

"What is the trouble, Baldo?" she asked, as calmly as though nothing unusual had happened.

"Well!" was the response. "You are a cool one, and no mistake. The matter is that Crandyl is after me with his dogs, and I've got to hide until he calls them off. I will get under your bed, and, if any one enters the room, pretend to be sleeping. There he is now!" he added, as the voice of his assailant, mingled with the growls of the bloodhounds, came through the window, and falling upon his hands and knees, Baldo, in a trice, was snugly hidden beneath the bed.

Crandyl led the dogs—two of them, large and fierce—beneath the window, and immediately they began nosing about the spot, but did not seem inclined to follow any particular trail. They would run about twenty feet toward the wood, then stop, point their noses in the air and bay, and this action they repeated time and time again, until their owner was almost beside himself with astonishment and vexation.

"Curse the brutes!" he exclaimed. "What can ail them? Here, King—come here!" and he led the larger of the two close to the base of the vine, and then loosed him.

Immediately, instead of running away again, as Crandyl expected, the dog raised himself upon his hind-legs, to all appearances trying to climb the wisteria.

"Confound you, for an infernal brute!" cried Crandyl, out of all patience. "I know he was up there, but where is he now? That's what I want to know," but, unfortunately, the dog's knowledge of the English language was so limited that he could not understand what his master said.

For fully half an hour did Gordon Crandyl keep the dogs there, running backward and forward in the twenty-foot space, and every now and then making desperate efforts to climb up the vine, but at last, despairing of any satisfactory results, he led them away, and repaired to Lorna's room.

In the excitement consequent upon finding the burglar (?) and his fruitless search for him, he had forgotten all about Lorna, whom he now thought must have fainted from fright, inasmuch as he had heard or seen no sign of her.

Entering the room, he discovered her in the same position as when he sprung from the window, and approaching her, he said:

"What, Lorna! asleep yet?"

Lorna opened her eyes in well-feigned astonishment, and then sprung to her feet.

"I must have fallen asleep in my chair," she said. "Oh, uncle! what time is it?"

"After twelve, and you should have been in bed long ago. How long have you been sleeping here?"

"I must have been some time," she replied, rising from her chair; "and," shuddering, "I had a horrid dream."

"Yes? What was it?"

Lorna yawned.

"I thought," she said, "that I was imprisoned, and that a friend came to help me escape, when, just as he was getting into the window, my jailer entered, and frightened him away."

Crandyl frowned, and Baldo smiled underneath the bed.

Surely this child, for one so unsophisticated, was progressing wonderfully in the arts of diplomacy.

"She must have partially awakened," muttered Crandyl to himself, "and the circumstances have changed themselves into a dream."

"Good-night, child," he said aloud. "It is high time for you to be in bed, and allow me to suggest that you lose no time in getting there," and with that, he closed the door behind him, and left the girl, with the very man, whom, but a few moments before, he would have set his bloodhounds upon.

As soon as the door had fairly closed behind Gordon Crandyl, Baldo crept from beneath the bed and stood as erect as he could, before his pupil.

"What do you want?" asked Lorna, laconically, as soon as he was before her.

"I want a talk with you."

"It came near being a costly want on your part."

"Bah! Do you think I care for Gordon Crandyl—or his dogs either?"

"I imagine you would, if they had gotten their teeth in your flesh."

"But they didn't."

"No."

For a moment Baldo silently regarded the girl before him.

"A veritable ship off the old block," he muttered to himself, but aloud, he said:

"You are progressing, in your new role."
 "I'm sorry for that."
 "Sorry—why?"
 "Because I do not like this usurping another's place."
 "Why?"
 "It's wicked."
 "Not so much so perhaps, as you think."
 "What can palliate the sin?"
 "For a moment Baldo hesitated.
 "The fact of your having as much right here, as Lorna Atherton," he said, at last.
 "The one with whom I exchanged my garments?" asked Lorna, with wide open eyes.
 "Yes."
 "How have I?"
 "I will have to defer my answer to that question, until some other time."
 "But I want the answer now."
 "You can't have it now—you must wait."
 "But I won't wait."
 "Yes you will, child, if I desire it."
 "I won't! I'll expose the whole thing first. Tell me that I have a right here, and prove it, and I will stay; otherwise, and I will leave tomorrow," and there was a look such as Vega often had, in her eyes, as she spoke.
 "But—confound it, girl! I know what is best for you—I am working for your interests."
 "Or for your own revenge for some wrong, which?"
 "For a moment Baldo was startled.
 "Shall I tell her the whole story, and trust to her hot blood to carry out my plans?" he thought. "No—that would hardly answer, and besides, she will work better, if she knows nothing of the end to be attained."
 "A little for my own sake," he replied at last, "and a good deal for Vega's, for I am sincere, Lorna, when I say it is for your interest to obey me implicitly—and besides, did not Vega tell you I was your friend?"
 "True! I had forgotten that," she murmured.
 The name of Vega acted like a charm upon Lorna, and Baldo had been wise enough to discover it. He was a deep, and scheming man, and one who always looked before he leaped. The game he was playing was a desperate one, of which fact he was well aware, and never perhaps, in the whole history of his life—and it had been a fitful one—had his whole resolution been more completely brought into play. That Lorna was but a child—comparatively uneducated, although bright to a remarkable degree, and that much depended upon her actions, he well knew. But he had waited years for some opportunity to turn up, by which he could wreak his revenge upon Gordon Crandyl for an old wound that still rankled, and when he had found Lady Lorna in Vega's hut, out of her mind; when upon coming to, she had insisted that she was a man, and that man, above all others, Ralph Gordon, it seemed to Baldo, as though the devil himself was playing into his hands. Then it was that he had made up his mind firmly to the course he would pursue, and having a rough sort of affection for Gipsy Lorna, he had thought to better her condition at the same time.
 True, he was a man who would not hesitate at any sacrifice, in order to achieve his own ends, but so long as the Gipsy girl would act in unison with him, he was resolved to endeavor to benefit her, at the same time.
 All that he had to depend upon, to the attainment of this end, was her innocence, the power of Vega's name, and her trust in him, and the last consideration he saw he was fast losing.
 "Why do you not trust me more than you do?" he asked her at last.
 "Because you have deceived me, and I think that a person who will deceive once will do so again."
 "In what way have I deceived you?"
 "In many ways. When I first came to the tree, you stooped much more than you do now, and your voice trembled like an old man's, besides the appearance of the fact that you could only hobble, not walk. Now I find your voice to be as strong and steady, and your language as perfect as that of the man whom you have told me to call uncle, while as for movement you are as spry as a wild hare."
 Baldo rubbed his hands and chuckled.
 "Thank you for complimenting me upon my acting," he said. "I had forgotten the fact that you were a Gipsy, and prone to shrewdness. Now if I will trust you more than I

have, will you, in return, place more confidence in me?"
 "Certainly."
 "Then look."
 She raised her eyes, and saw Baldo hastily remove his bald wig, and straighten his back, after which he stood before her in the light of a character that you—reader—have seen before.
 It was Jim Munger, the murderer of old Paul Leonard.
 Beyond a faint look of surprise in Lorna's face, the transformation in the man before her had no effect.
 "Now why did you come here to-night?" she said. "I am tired and would retire if you are ready to depart."
 "It was only anxiety that brought me," he replied, as he replaced the wig, "so I will go now, and let you get some sleep," and with a hasty "good-night!" he sprung from the window, and disappeared in the darkness.

CHAPTER XVII.
 THE COUNTERFEITERS' DEN.

WHEN Crandyl left Lorna's presence he went straight to his room, and turning the wick up in his lamp seated himself at his desk and began to write.
 He was not a handsome man, and yet there was something interesting in his face, which, except for something slightly on the sinister—a narrowness between the eyes—might be voted almost good-looking. Blue eyes; a long, blonde mustache, and a coarse, cruel mouth were his most prominent features, while his figure was tall and well shaped.
 For some time his pen rapidly traversed the lines before him, but finally pausing, folding and addressing his letter, he placed it where his valet would find it in the morning, then going to his closet and selecting a dark suit of clothes, he soon arrayed himself in them. Donning a black wig and changing his mustache to the same hue by means of some *cosmetique* he placed a black felt hat on his head and left the lodge.
 Calling his dogs—King and Bruno—he patted them for a moment, and then started off through the woods.
 After walking for some time, he paused before the door of a hut, not unlike the one in which Vega died, and rapped loudly on the panel.
 "Who's there?" asked a gruff voice from the interior.
 "A friend," replied Crandyl.
 "What do you want?"
 "Lodging."
 "Anything else?"
 "Yes."
 "What?"
 "Lodging!"
 "Good—come in," and the door sprung open, revealing a snug-looking interior, although the floor was almost bare, and would have been quite so, had it not been for the skins of wild animals, carelessly strewn here and there.
 "Everything safe?" asked Crandyl in a low tone, when he had entered the hut.
 "Straight's a lightnin'-rod, Cap," replied the occupant of the cabin.
 "Good; are the boys at work?"
 "I reckon they are, Cap."
 "Good again. Any news from Richmond?"
 "Nothin' new."
 "Is Captain Ironnerve captured yet?"
 "I reckon he aren't," and the man chuckled grimly.
 "Have Quigly and Small returned from Richmond yet?"
 "No; but I expect them every minute."
 "Good. When they come, send them to me at once. I'll go below now."
 "Keyrect, Cap!"
 Gordon Crandyl moved quickly across the small room, to one corner, and pulled a peg from the wall, which looked as though it might be placed there as some sort of window fastener, then his companion followed him, and placing his feet upon the planks immediately beneath the peg, the other end of them was seen to fly up, disclosing a flight of steps, down which Gordon Crandyl, alias Captain Ironnerve, the counterfeiter, quickly passed, and the trap closed over his head.
 It was only a short flight of steps, down which he passed, thence through a corridor for perhaps fifty feet, when, after passing through two doors, (heavy, and studded with brass nails, like the Sighing Pine entrance,) he entered a

large, square room, brilliantly lighted, and in which fully a dozen men were diligently at work.
 They all looked up from their work as he entered, and there was a general exclamation of "Evenin' Cap," after which they continued their various occupations.
 Calling one of the men to him, the captain led the way from the room, by a door opposite the one at which he entered, and proceeded at once to what he termed his "office."
 It was a room probably twenty feet square, furnished as elegantly as though in a Fifth avenue mansion, instead of a cavern in the woods of Virginia. Paintings hung upon the walls, or rather were suspended between the folds of the tapestries which completely covered the four sides of the room. In one corner stood picturesque looking racks, upon which samples of bills of different value were posted. At the end of the room was a large desk, strewn with papers, and bills, and in the large office-chair in front of it, Captain Ironnerve seated himself, and motioned his companion to a seat but a few feet away.
 "Well, Sam?" he said.
 "Well cap'n," replied the negro, who was a perfect giant in stature, and as black as ebony.
 "You went to Richmond?"
 "Yes, sah."
 "Any news of Gordon?"
 "No, sah."
 "The devil!"
 "Yes, sah."
 "What did you do?"
 "What yous tole me, sah."
 "And you heard nothing of him?"
 "No, sah."
 "Where could he have gone?"
 "Dunno, sah."
 A pause.
 "Did you hear *nothing*—no rumor whatsoever?" asked the captain at last.
 "Only jes' a little, sah. De young lady—Missie Leonyard I tink it am—has skipped de kentry, and cop's t'nk dat whar she am, dere also am he."
 "Has a search been made for her?"
 "Dere hes; but she was probably killed in de railroad accident dat you remember. Dat am de train she went on, an' a body wer foun' dat answered to de describing as dey had it."
 Captain Ironnerve sprang to his feet and stuck out his hand to the negro.
 "Sam!" he cried—"you have given me the best piece of news I've had in ten years. Now I want you to go right back where you came from; find out the truth regarding Lillian Leonard's death, and if"—and his voice sunk to a lower key—"if she is still alive make a corpse of her!"
 "Yes, sah."—The darkey's imperturbable coolness did not desert him, even in the face of the captain's hellish remark.
 "You may get what money you want of Benton," continued Ironnerve, "and while you are about it, you may take a few thousand of the 'queer,' and get rid of that. By the way! Did you go to the Dive while you were down?"
 "No, sah."
 "Well, go there this time. Some of the boys may know something of what I am so anxious to find out."
 "Yes, sah," and with a low salaam the Ethiopian left the "office," only to be shouted at again, and told to send Munger to the captain, when once more he took his leave.
 "Strange that I never thought of this before," muttered Ironnerve, as soon as he was alone. "I can just as well have Paul Leonard's property as not, by simply putting this girl, Lillian, out of the way, and putting in my claim. Something has got to be done with it, that's certain; and if the girl is dead already, so much the better, inasmuch as it will save me one more crime," he shrugged his shoulders; "but one or two more or less would make very little difference, as far as that is concerned, I imagine."
 "What the devil has become of Gordon? I never could believe the guards killed him when he escaped, although the public, thank fortune, think that Captain Ironnerve has gone under, and unless he turns up somewhere pretty soon, I am afraid I will be obliged to think so, too."
 He chuckled at his own humor, and turning to his papers, kept busily turning them over and over, reading some of them carefully, and laying others aside, until the entrance of Jim Munger.
 Munger was Captain Ironnerve's right-hand

man—his first lieutenant, having supreme control in the absence of the captain, and truth to tell, controlling the captain a little also.

"Good-evening, captain," he said, as he entered.

"Ah! good-evening, Jim. How are things progressing in the press room?"

"Well enough," replied Jim, helping himself to a seat and lighting a cigar. "That new twenty, on the bank of Mobile, doesn't seem to pan out well, but otherwise, everything's O. K."

"What is the matter with the twenty?"

"Quigly hurt his hand just before he went away, and I was obliged to put Barnes on the job, and to speak frankly, although in many respects a valuable man, at engraving he is not quite up to the mark."

"How is that fifty on the Bank of Chicago?"

"Splendid! Never saw a better job in my life! Here it is now, good and bad, and, as expert as you are in these matters, I'll bet you the good one that you can't pick it out."

"Done!"

The captain took the bills in his hand and examined them attentively. For fully half an hour he studied, while Munger smoked on in silence, a satisfied smile playing around the corners of his mouth, but at last, laying them both upon the desk in front of him, he unlocked a draw, and, counting out five ten-dollar bills, he laid them upon the two fifties and handed the whole to his lieutenant.

"I'll have to give it up," he said. "It's the best job I ever saw. Who did it?"

"The new fellow we initiated but a short time ago. He's as smart as lightning, and I consider him a very valuable acquisition."

"What is his name?"

"Philip Roebuck, but the boys all call him 'Bucky' for short."

"Do you think he can be depended upon?"

"I'd stake my life on it!"

"Why?"

The question was asked quietly enough, and yet it had a peculiar intonation which caused Munger to look quickly up into the face of the captain.

"Why?" repeated Ironnerve as quietly as before.

"I only judge from my knowledge of human nature in general," replied Jim. "I think I have had to do with men long enough to tell a square one when I see him."

"Where, was it you got this Bucky?"

"There's quite a little romance connected with it. The facts are these: while I was in Richmond the last time, I was unfortunate enough to get into a street brawl, and should probably have been in prison now if Bucky, whom I had never seen before, had not slugged the peeler under the ear and told me to follow him, which advice I was by no means slow to act upon."

"And you, feeling that you ought to reciprocate, brought him here, I suppose," said the Captain, sarcastically.

"Exactly; but not before sounding him thoroughly."

"Did he appear anxious to come?"

"Not particularly. He had to trample down a few scruples, first."

"And his name you say, is—"

"Philip Roebuck. But what makes you so particular, all at once?"

"Because I fancy that there are some new, and more than ordinarily sharp detectives on our tracks, and that would be just the game a shrewd one would play."

"Well, I'll answer for Bucky. He's made remarkable progress with the boys; they all like him."

"I received a telegram yesterday that Dick Sharp had disappeared from Richmond, and Jim, to my mind, that means mischief. Sharp has never undertaken the task of tracking us, but I have had him paid well for keeping out of the chase. If he has found some one who is willing to pay him more than I have, he will not hesitate to break his word with me, and they say of him, that he never yet missed his man."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DOUBLE GAME.

JIM MUNGER left his chair, lighted a fresh cigar, and then threw himself upon the couch.

"Well, Cap," he said, "I did not think you were so nervous. Ring, and have Bucky brought in, and interview him for yourself; there's nothing like being self-satisfied, in this world."

The captain touched a small gong that lay at his side, and almost immediately a young Ethiopian made his appearance.

"Tell Roebuck I want him," was his order, and he departed to do his bidding.

Munger said no more, but there was a half smile of scorn in his eyes while they were waiting for the appearance of the newly-fledged counterfeiter. No doubt, something was passing in his mind which amused him, for he looked so supremely content that the captain remarked it.

"What pleases you, Jim?" he asked.

"This cigar," returned that worthy. "I never smoked better. Where did you get them?"

"Prieto sent me them from Sagua la Grande. He only knows me as Crandyl, you know, and now I think of it, you are the only one who knows that Gordon Crandyl and Captain Ironnerve are one and the same person, for which little confidence you ought to consider yourself highly complimented."

"Thanks," returned the other dryly. "I do; particularly as I made the discovery myself."

"By the way!" said the captain, after a short hiatus. "Some fellow tried to break into the Lodge last night, just before I came to the Den."

"Is that so?"—surprised.

"Yes; an old fellow completely doubled up with age, but as spry as a young kitten. I put King and Bruno on his track, but the infernal brutes either couldn't or wouldn't follow him, I don't know which."

"Couldn't," thought Munger, but he said: "That's rather strange. How did it happen?"

Ironnerve related the occurrence that had so puzzled him, to his colleague, and had hardly finished when the tapestries were pushed aside, and Philip Roebuck entered the "office."

Let me describe him.

About five feet ten in height; broad of the shoulders and deep in the chest; clean shaven face, revealing square, and firmly set jaws, and a wide, straight, unyielding mouth; brown crispy hair, and clear, piercing, hazel eyes. When he spoke in greeting the chiefs, his voice was deep and musical.

That the captain was favorably impressed at first sight, was at once visible, for, long accustomed to dealing with desperate men, he had grown to take a person all in at a glance.

"I have heard very favorable reports of you, Mr. Roebuck," he said, "and naturally I wished to talk with our new recruit."

Roebuck bowed.

"I am at your service, captain," he said.

"I merely desire to ask you a few questions, such as are invariably put to a new member. I suppose you are willing to respond to one and all?" and the captain's eyes seemed to look through the man before him as he spoke.

"Yes, sir; at least any that can affect my relations with the League."

"What business were you engaged in before you came to us?"

"I was a steel engraver."

"Where?"

"With Tissot and Montey, New York."

The captain noted it down.

"How came you in Richmond?"

"I have always been a sort of Bohemian, and when I tire of one place I seek another. Being an expert workman, I can always get employment."

"Exactly—hum! How old are you, Mr. Roebuck?"

"Thirty-nine."

"Any relatives living?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you communicated with them while here?"

"Once."

"Ah! where did you post your letter?"

"I sent it to Richmond by Quigly."

"Hum! I suppose you are familiar with our rules by this time?"

"I am—yes, sir; but Mr. Munger gave me permission to send my letter, in which I stated my intention of leaving the country, and I need never write again."

"Excuse me, Mr. Roebuck; but you are no doubt aware of the penalty inflicted upon any one proven to be a traitor to our League."

"Death."

"Exactly. I speak of this, because I wish to thoroughly be understood, and so long as you are true and constant to our cause, you will not know what it is to want—but if untrue, in the least instance—BEWARE!"

"I am not blind, sir."

"That is evident. You may go now."

"Well—what do you think of him?" asked Munger, after Roebuck had left the room.

"I like him, and I don't. He looks like a man to be trusted, and yet there is something about him that looks suspicious."

Munger laughed.

"Why, old fellow!" he said. "You will be distrusting me, next."

"I may—look out."

Had they heard Roebuck's remark as he left them, one, perhaps both, would have been somewhat astonished.

"Fools!" he muttered. "Your game is almost played out," and there was a meaning smile in his eyes as he returned to his work.

For a long time the two heads of the counterfeiters' league talked and smoked, but at last the captain, after looking at his watch, arose and took his departure.

After he had gone, Munger sat for some time, deep in thought.

"He's a cool one," he mused, "and not easy to get ahead of, but he must give in to Jim Munger. I'm playing for high stakes, and there must be no such word as fail."

With that thought in his mind, he too left the "office," and repaired to his own room, where he found Lady Lorna Atherton, in the guise of "Lawrence," lying on the couch, reading.

She was still mad, but enough of her old habits had come back to her to again make her fond of her novels.

Thus far, Munger—or Baldo—had succeeded in keeping her presence a secret from the men, but he knew that sooner or later it must become known, and his great fear was that Crandyl would see her. He had considered the practicability of sending her away where no such chance should be possible, but he disliked to do so from the fact that he might have to use her as one of the meshes in the web he was weaving around Gordon Crandyl.

"Why do you keep me in this chamber so long?" she asked him, as he entered.

"Well, Law—excuse me—Ralph," he replied, cheerily, "you know you have been very ill, and it might be dangerous for you to go into the open air so soon after your convalescence."

"I feel well enough."

"That is good news. Keep quiet for a day or two longer, and by that time I hope it will be safe for you to go out—and I will know what to do with you," he continued, to himself.

Roebuck had seen the captain depart, and as soon thereafter as he could leave his bench, he had passed along the corridor, in order to have an interview with Munger, and had seen the latter leave the office and go off toward the other end of the cavern.

His first impulse was to join him, but a second thought prompted him to creep along stealthily behind, and finally he saw the lieutenant enter his own apartment.

"I wonder what he has got in there?" murmured the spy. "It will do no harm to find out, and it may be worth my while to know."

He crept quietly forward and cautiously raised the latch.

No; Munger had not fastened the door after him, and Roebuck opened it wide enough to hear what was going on inside.

"A woman's voice!" he muttered to himself. "Good, my friend! So you break the rules, eh?"

"There's something evidently wrong here," he continued, as he listened to the conversation inside, "and I think it is to my interest to find it out."

Throughout all the conversation between Munger and Lady Lorna, Roebuck listened with all his ears, but what puzzled him most was the fact that, although he was satisfied of its being a woman's voice he heard, still he assuredly heard the man address her as Ralph.

"Some pet name, undoubtedly," he thought, "and yet they do not talk like lovers. I'm inclined to think this Munger a deep one, and he probably has his own game to play; but, old fellow, Bucky's got his eye, or, rather, his ear, on you now, and you've got to get up in the A. M. to checkmate me."

Still he listened, but the occupants of the room seemed to have finished their conversation, so at last, creeping quietly away to some distance, he boldly turned, walked back to the door of Munger's room, and knocked.

A moment's silence, and then:

"Who's there?"

"I—Roebuck."

Another pause; and presently the door was opened quickly, and Jim Munger stepped into the passageway, closing it as quickly behind him.

"What is wanting?" he asked.

"Nothing particular; only tired and was coming in to have a smoke with you before going to the arms of Murphy, as the Irishman has it."

"Certainly—let's smoke—but what do you say to going outside? I, for one, am tired of this close air of the cavern."

"D—nation!" was the exclamation that almost escaped Roebuck's lips, at Munger's quick wit, but, "A good idea," he said, and the two men strolled toward the pine-tree-entrance.

"You're sharper than you look," thought Roebuck, as they walked along together, "but I'll beat you yet—if I can, and I think I can."

"A double game is a hard one for one man to play, particularly when such high stakes are in question, and I think I hold the winning cards. I'll copper the deuce to lose, anyway, and watch my chances."

Out under the trees they went together, talking cheerfully, but each was trying to think how he could the more easily get the best of the other.

Such is life.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ESCAPE.

BOTH Ralph and Mosquito, were nearly played out when they pulled under the stern of the schooner, but Mosquito showed all the cunning of the insect after which he was named, as soon as they were out of sight of their pursuers.

Hastily dropping his oars, and seizing Ralph's, he tied them all together, fastening the whole to the gunwale of the boat, then shoving back a bolt in the bottom of the boat he lifted a trap, composed of nearly two-thirds of the boat's bottom, and telling Ralph to follow, sprung in to the river.

The boat sunk from sight, almost before they were out of it, and then they swam together for the chains of the schooner, pulled themselves quickly to the deck, and dropped down behind the windlass.

Not a moment too soon, for they had scarcely cleared the rail, when the police boat rounded the stern of the craft upon which they sought shelter, and in a moment more, were hailing the watch aboard the schooner.

Some one has said "there is some good with every evil," and the truth of this statement was proven in this instance.

The watch aboard the schooner was fond of his grog, and as luck would have it, had partaken of more than was good for him, upon the night in question, so that when our friends climbed up the chains, he was peacefully sleeping, and therefore did not hear them, and when the officers hailed him, he was smart enough to swear that he had kept a vigilant watch, and, to use his own expression, "hadn't seen a bloody thing."

To say that the men in the police boat were astonished, would be to almost misrepresent their feelings. They were thunderstruck, bewildered, nonplused. To pursue a boat containing two men, pulling for their lives, and then to have them escape in so mysterious a manner, completely beat them.

Had the men gotten away and left the boat, there might, in that case, be some visible reason for it, but to have the boat itself disappear, as though some Genius had lifted it from the river as in the days of Aladdin, was more than they could account for, and when, at last, they rowed away, it was with many surmises as to the probable course of the boat they had been pursuing.

"Now, my boy," said Ralph, in a low tone, as soon as the coast was clear, and the watch was once more dozing with his overweight of grog, "how are we going to get ashore?"

This was a poser for the lad, but he boasted that he was never without resource in an emergency, so whispering "wait here," he crept swiftly and silently away.

In about fifteen minutes he returned.

"O. K., Cap," he said in a low tone. "I've put his nobs into a sound sleep, and also twigg'd a cockle loose on the davits aft."

"What have you done?"

"Chloroformed the watch and found a boat we can snipe. Come along."

With extreme caution they made their way toward the stern of the vessel, and sure enough,

hanging loose upon the davits was a small boat, there being but two or three turns about the cleat to hold it in position.

Mosquito grasped one line and Ralph the other, and together they lowered the boat slowly to the bosom of the river, and when, at last, she was safely alongside, and no one had been aroused, they climbed quickly down the side, and as expeditiously pulled out into the river.

Not a living thing was in sight. Only here and there some barge or schooner, floating at anchor, betokened the fact that life existed there.

The moon was hidden behind a cloud, and only a few of the more distant stars were visible, as they fleetly and silently pulled in the direction of the "Dive."

"Tell you what, Cap!" exclaimed the lad, in a low tone, as soon as they were out of danger. "That was a right smart chase. If that boat of ours hadn't been fixed with the trap, 'twould have been a cold day for us, eh?"

"Rather," agreed Ralph.

"Those chaps were bent on nabbin' us, boss, an' I think they kinder tumbled to who we was, too."

"What makes you think that?"

"I dunno, unless 'cause they buckled down to biz so smart."

"They might merely have thought us to be river thieves; they would have tried as hard to catch us, and besides, you know, I am thought to be dead by the authorities."

A lengthy silence.

"This seat is rather hard," remarked Mosquito, at last. "I reckon that beastly chunk o' lead plowed a furrer in my posterior."

"That's so—by Jove!" exclaimed Ralph. "I had forgotten that you were hit. Is it anything serious, think?"

"Naw! only a scratch; it'll kinder stump me on dinners, I'm afraid—that's all."

"How will it interfere with your dinners?"

"Nothin', only I'll have to eat 'em off the mantle, 'cause I don't think settin' will be comfortable."

"Lay down your oars, and let me pull in," said Ralph, forgetting that he too had felt a ball strike him, and that he was already weakened by his over-exertion.

"Wasn't you teched?" asked the boy.

"Only grazed in the side—nothing more."

"Then look here!" and the boy rested upon his oars, and looked around at his companion with the air of a Supreme Court Judge. "I'm cap'n of this craft, an' wot's more, you're my patient. Now jest you turn in on the bottom of the boat, an' leave the hull biz to me."

"No—nol, I'll do my share."

"But I say y' won't. Your carcass is worth a thousand dollars to me, providin' it's alive; but dead—an' 'taint worth a hunk o' cold taters, 'thout any salt. You flop down there and simmer, an' let me do the boilin'. Not that I consider my muscles equal to yours, but you've been an invalid and I aren't, an' that shifts the wind from your quarter. The Doc said you was to keep mum, and not go to firin' off your extra steam when 'twasn't wanted. It's got ter be a cold day when a mosquiter can't buzz."

This argument was too conclusive, and so Ralph, at heart, nothing loth, laid his oars aside, and allowed the boy to finish the distance.

At last their destination was reached, the loose portion of the pier thrown aside, and in a very few moments thereafter they were snugly ensconced in their quarters.

Ralph procured a long-stemmed pipe—the physician having given him permission to smoke—and stretching his body upon the bed, set himself to thinking out some plan which might be wise for him to follow.

Well he knew that he must keep out of Gordon Crandyl's clutches, if he hoped to evade the law until the real criminal was discovered, and he rightly conjectured that his enemy was the head of the very association that was harboring him.

Then why had not Crandyl discovered his presence?

He asked himself this question again and again, and the only reply he could find was that the head of the city "department" had had no opportunity of informing the chief, or if he had, for some inexplicable reason, had neglected to do so.

True, he did not know that Crandyl and Captain Ironnerve were one, but now that he had so much time to think things over, he

could recollect many strange actions on the part of his former friend, which, now that the illusion was dispelled, would not admit of very close research, only in the event of finding out the pseudo gentleman's villainy.

"Putting two and two together inevitably makes four," he mused, "and, accepting the hypothesis that Crandyl is at the head of the counterfeiters' gang; not forgetting that he spends most of his time at home at the Lodge, I am free to think that their head-quarters are somewhere in the woods of our estate."

"But where? that's the question," he continued to himself. "I have known Crandyl to be absent from home several times during the night, but would always come down in the morning as though he had been in his bed all night; dozens of times he has gone off hunting during the day, returning at night with less game than it would take me two hours to bag. Yes, their head-quarters are somewhere in those woods, I am certain, and the best thing I can do is to get out of here with all expedition."

One of the gang was passing his door, and he called out to him, asking if he would not tell Mosquito that he would like to see him.

It was but a few moments before the lad appeared, and, in conjunction with a request from Ralph, he seated himself at the side of the bed.

"I think you are a pretty good friend of mine, are you not, Mosquito?" Ralph asked at last.

"You can jest bet your sweet life I am!" was the response.

"Good! Now listen; as long as you stick closely to me you shall never know what it is to want. I am rich, and, if you will help me in a task I have undertaken, I will give you enough when the job is consummated to keep you for the remainder of your days."

"Drive ahead, Cap."

"Will you do this?"

"Ef 'tain't givin' my pals away I will; but you wouldn't ask me to do that."

"No, I would not; but there is one man among them who has done me a very great injury, and that man must suffer!"

"Right you are, sir; he must belong to the other gang."

"Are there two separate organizations, then?" asked Ralph, quickly.

"Yes; but both controlled by the same head."

"Ah, I thought so! And that head is—?"

"Captain Ironnerve."

"Exactly! Do you know him?"

"Never sot eyes on 'im in my life."

"Good—I am very glad!"

"Why?"

"Because he is the man I mean."

"The chief?"

"Yes."

Mosquito scratched his head.

"He's a right smart party to git the bulge on, Cap," he remarked at length, "and we are all sworn to stand by him through thick and thin."

"Certainly, but he is not one of your 'pals,' as you call them."

"Keep still a minute, Cap, an' let me think," said the lad, and then he argued the question in his own mind as to whether or not it would be honorable for him to go against the one under whose orders he ostensibly was.

For a long time he continued in a brown study, but at last, reaching out his hand and grasping that of Ralph, he said:

"Drive on, Cap—I'm yours to command."

CHAPTER XX.

"HE SHALL BE CAGED!"

RALPH gladly shook the grimy little hand extended to him, and his heart warmed more than ever toward the boy who had so thoroughly proven the old maxim: "A friend in need is a friend indeed."

"You never saw the captain, you say?" asked Ralph, at length.

"Never, that I know of."

"Do you know anything about him?"

"No; only that he's as ugly as Satan in his tempers."

"Were you ever at the head-quarters—where the other gang hold out, I mean?"

"Never, but I know pretty well where it is."

"That will answer as well. Cran—the captain generally remains there, does he not?"

"Yes."

"Where is it?"

"Somewhere in Virginia."

"Do you know where?"
 "No."
 "Can you find out?"
 "Yes."
 "Do so."
 "I will."
 "When?"
 "To day."
 "I want to go there."
 "Go there? Say, Cap, I don't believe you're well yet. Nobody with a sound nut on their shoulders, would want to go there, unless he had some biz—"
 "I have business."
 "Worth the risk?"
 "Yes—and more."
 "That settles it! We'll go."
 "I must get away from here."
 "That's easy enough."
 "How?"
 "Walk away. Nobody 'll stop you."
 "We'll go to-morrow."
 "O. K., Cap."
 "Would you rather go with me, than remain here?"
 "Cert! aren't you worth a thousand to me—and aren't you goin' to be worth a heap more?"
 "I hope so."
 "Shake on that, Cap." They shook.
 "What are you goin' to do?" asked Mosquito, after a pause.
 "I'm going to Virginia."
 "I know—but what, when you get there?"
 "Make Cran—Captain Ironnerve suffer!" ground out Ralph, whose temper had not improved since his arrest.
 "What for?"
 "A thousand things! This for one," touching his wound.
 "He didn't give it to you."
 "No, but he's the cause of it."
 "Who's this Cran, you've been tryin' to talk about?"
 "Ironnerve's other name."
 "Whew-w-w!"
 "And you'll stick by me, boy?"
 "Till I can't see!"

And so this strange friendship was cemented, and in after years, when Mosquito after the collegiate course which Ralph subsequently gave him, looked back upon this time, he felt that he could fall upon his knees and worship his benefactor, with a truer reverence than many accord the Almighty.

All that day was passed in laying plans, and deciphering means to execute them, and when night came, they both repaired early to bed, slept soundly, and the next morning felt ready for any emergency.

Early in the morning Mosquito had gone out and purchased a wig and a pair of smoked glasses for Ralph, securing a new costume for himself meanwhile, so that when the two issued from the house in which Ralph had been an invalid for so long their best friends would not have known them.

They wended their way boldly up the principal street, until at last Ralph paused before a sign which read:

PHILIP ROGERS,
 PRIVATE DETECTIVE,

and telling Mosquito to wait for him, he entered the office.

Mr. Rogers was in and saluted our hero with that grave self-possession which men of his stamp always have at their command.

"Mr. Rogers, I presume," said Ralph.

"The same," was his response.

"I want you to take a case for me."

"Certainly; be seated. What is its nature?"

"Rather dangerous."

"So much the better. Proceed."

"Before going further," said Ralph, "let me add that in the event of your success, you will be handsomely rewarded, but if you fail, I can only afford to pay you for your time."

"Exactly; but I must hear the case before agreeing to take it."

"Of course. The main fact is this: I want you to arrest Captain Ironnerve."

"But report says he's dead."

"Report lies."

"I thought as much. Are you the man who was mistaken for him?"

Ralph was startled.

Should he reveal his identity to this man? Who could tell which was the best course to pursue? He liked the face before him, but appearances are sometimes deceptive, still he thought, "nothing risked is nothing gained."

"You are right," he said at last, "and in order to right myself, I am obliged to throw myself upon your generosity."

"The best thing to do," said Philip Rogers, "for I never thought that you were Captain Ironnerve."

"Thank you for that!" cried Ralph. "Will you undertake this case for me?"

"That depends upon yourself, Mr. Gordon. Business is business, you know."

"Certainly. If you cage this bird, I will give you ten thousand dollars, and if you fail—"

"I won't fail!"

"All right. In that case I will give you ten thousand dollars, as I said before."

"Agreed!"

"Agreed."

"Now tell me all you know, for I imagine you know something."

"You are partially correct in your surmise, Mr. Rogers," and Ralph then proceeded to recount to the detective all his suspicions regarding Gordon Crandyl, and when he had done, Rogers agreed with him in thinking that Ironnerve and Crandyl were one.

"I think I know my game," said the detective, after thinking deeply for some time. "It is very necessary to gain access to their stronghold, in order to discover where one is going to land, before leaping. Crandyl, you say, is a blonde?"

"Yes."

"Fine looking?"

"Rather."

"Give me a description of him, and be particular about the expression of the eyes, the sound of the voice, and his manner of walking."

Ralph did so.

"Let me see," mused the detective, after taking notes of the description of his man. "These woods, you say, are extensive and dense?"

"Very."

"And Laurel Lodge is in the midst of them?"

"At the very heart."

"Servants?"

"Five or six."

"Dogs?"

"Two—and very savage—bloodhounds."

"Ah!" Another pause, and Ralph began to feel great confidence in the man he had selected.

"Is this all you can tell me?" was the next question.

"Everything."

"Very well. You have given me several very good points to work on, and in less than thirty days your Captain Ironnerve shall be caged, or my name isn't Phil Rogers."

Ralph sprung to his feet and grasped the hand of the man before him.

"Keep your word as to that," he cried, "and I will put another thousand on your fee, by way of bonus! It is worth more than anything else in this world to me to find the true Captain Ironnerve, and convict him, thus proving my own innocence, not only with regard to complicity in the murder, but in dispelling the cloud under which I am so long as Gordon Crandyl is at large."

"How do you account for the sudden change in his demeanor toward you?"

"I had had a picture in my possession for some time which bore a remarkable resemblance to a person whom we both knew, and, upon showing it to him, he accused me of stealing it, and I knocked him down. I imagine I had begun to be somewhat in his way also, and accordingly he put two and two together and resolved to get rid of me."

"Yes, but how did he happen at your uncle's house just in time to accuse you of the murder?"

"Of that I know no more than you, and I think it must have either been a strange coincidence or the working of some deep plot against me."

"Which do you think?"

"I rather incline to the former, for I think him too cautious a man to let a third party into so serious a secret as that."

"Had you no friends here by whom you could have proven your identity?"

"None, except the very man who was murdered. You know I am a foreigner, and since I have been in this country, the most of my time has been spent in the woods of Virginia upon an estate which Crandyl and I purchased jointly. All the time spent in town has been at the house of my uncle, and my visits

there very infrequent, for truth to tell, I had grown so satiated with city life, that wandering through the woods with a gun in my hands seemed a paradise. The thing that strikes me as most peculiar is the fact that Crandyl should consent to have me with him in the midst of his nefarious trade."

"Perhaps he foresaw some risk on his own account, and being, I should judge, of an utterly unscrupulous nature, wished to use you as the cat's-paw with which to pull his chestnuts out of the fire. Or, again," thoughtfully, "he may have thought that he could eventually enroll you in the ranks of his gang, and so both work together. In any light you can put it, it is a mixed up case, and, in my opinion, more behind it than either you or I dream of. Your name is Ralph Gordon, you say, and his is Gordon Crandyl? What relation do you bear each other?"

"That of distant cousins only. My grandfather and Gordon Crandyl's father were first cousins, if you care to go back and climb the genealogical tree to such a height."

"Well," said Rogers, after a few moments' thought, during which his brow was wrinkled in perplexity, "as I said before, there is something behind all this, and I can and will find it out if it takes me a lifetime. Let me manage the thing in my own way, and you shall be righted in every way."

With this assurance Ralph arose to depart, feeling that he could depend fully on the resolute man before him.

"You've been long enough, Cap," said Mosquito, when Ralph joined him.

"Yes," was the reply, "but it was time well spent," and so they left for safer quarters than one of the public streets of Richmond.

CHAPTER XXI.

ON THE RIGHT TRACK.

PHILIP ROGERS was one who did not believe in any needless delay at any time, and particularly in a case of the importance of the one which had just been put in his hands, and Ralph could have scarcely left the street door ere he was before his mirror with his lather-cup, brush and razor, and in a very short time his face was as cleanly shaven as that of a youth.

With some preparation he darkened the skin where the beard had been removed, and in less than an hour, he had left the house, so transformed that his best friends would scarcely have recognized him.

Men in his profession are generally pretty well acquainted with the "marked men" of the city in which they reside, although they do not always know to which particular branch of the "prey-trade" they belong. Accordingly, when he saw Jim Munger coming up the street toward him, he knew him as belonging to the class called "crooked," and resolved at once to make his acquaintance, in the hope that he might glean some knowledge which would prove useful in the search he had undertaken.

"With this object in view, he turned, and at a safe distance, followed him, trusting to some unlooked-for chance, to bring about the means of an introduction."

Fate proved herself more kind than is her custom, in this instance, for scarce a mile had been passed over, before the man whom he was following, stopped, and appeared to be engaged in some altercation with several men, and while Rogers was still looking, Munger—whose temper was very quick—struck one of the men a blow that felled him like a log, and then, as the others rushed in to revenge their friend, he whipped out a long, murderous-looking knife, and stood at bay.

On rushed the men, and in less time than it takes to tell it, a second had fallen, and the blood was streaming from an ugly wound in his side; then there was a cry of "Police! slope!" and the whole lot turned and ran.

It was a truly desperate resolve that Rogers took when he saw the officer running toward Munger, and hastily glancing around to see that no other uniforms were hovering near, he too ran forward, and just as the policeman placed his hand upon Munger's shoulder, struck him a blow that dropped him like an ox, and telling the counterfeiter to follow, ran with all speed down a side street, through an alleyway into another street, and then into a saloon where he well knew they could find shelter. There they remained until disguises could be

procured, and escape from the city rendered easy.

As soon as they were safely sheltered in a private room, with a bottle of the best "Kentuck" before them, Munger extended his hand to the man who had rendered him such an unlooked for assistance, and shook it warmly.

"You have rendered me a service which I can never repay, I fear," he said. "Rest assured though, should I ever get the chance, I will not hesitate."

"It is nothing," replied the detective. "You drew your knife in exactly the same manner I would have done, and used it in a way I would recommend. I thought I recognized a kindred spirit and resolved to rescue you."

"What is your business?" asked Munger.

"An engraver, by trade, though of late, I have followed it very little, preferring to get my living in an easier manner than working for the Government," and he smiled meaningly.

"Ah!—you are an expert, then?"

"I have been so considered."

"Exactly!"

The counterfeiter thought he saw a chance to secure a valuable member for their gang, and resolved to sound him. He was anxious too, to get in some men upon whom he could personally depend, in order to work out a plot upon which his mind had been engaged for some time back. He was an ambitious man, sharp and cunning, and instead of being only a subordinate in the League, he chose rather to be its head, but this he knew he could not accomplish without being sure of the constancy of the majority of its members, and to this aim he concluded to sound the man before him, and if possible, secure him.

"Are you of a very conscientious turn of mind?" he began, by way of prelude.

"Terribly!" laughed the detective. "I would no more interfere with an officer in the discharge of his duty, than I would rob a house, or stick a knife into a man that I loved—at a distance. You see, I have been living upon my wits now for some time, and that is a particular incentive to conscientiousness," and he laughed long and loud.

"What is your title?"

"Philip Roebuck—Bucky for short."

"Well, Bucky—I suppose I may so address you, for I foresee that we will become good friends in the future—my name is Jim Munger—a man well known to the police, and I may add that if you had not rescued me to-day, the knife business would have been the smallest charge against me, by far."

Bucky stuck out his hand.

"I am glad," he said, "that the opportunity offered for me to be of assistance; the more so, from the fact that I have no doubt but that you can put me onto something, whereby I can feel some degree of security and ease."

"That I can, you bet! Listen!" and Munger bent slightly forward, fully satisfied now that this was just the man he was looking for, while Roebuck, on his side was heartily chuckling up his sleeve, being convinced that he had struck the right party.

"How would you like to become a member of the best gang of counterfeiters in the world?" asked Munger.

The detective sprang to his feet.

"The very thing!" he cried, "you couldn't have proposed a thing more to my fancy, and my ability in engraving will prove of some assistance to you, for, without bragging, I'll bet there isn't a man in the country that can do better or finer work than I."

"Good! But before we go any further, I want to enlist you in my particular service."

"You're the one who does me the good turn; I see no reason why I should not swear by you."

"Good again; attend, and I will explain. I belong to the gang controlled by one Captain Ironnerve, of whom no doubt you have heard."

"I should smile!"

"Exactly. He was reported captured some little time ago, but it was a false report; a case of mistaken identity, you know."

"I didn't know; but go ahead."

"I am of an ambitious turn of mind, and nothing would give me more pleasure than to have the leadership of our League in my own name; not alone to gratify my ambition, but Ironnerve has made himself particularly obnoxious to me, and the fact is, I want to pay him for it, and with interest."

"Certainly! when a person gets the best of you in anyway, it is natural that you should

want revenge, and I am just the man to help a comrade in a job of that nature, every time."

What a stroke of good luck had fallen to the fortunes of the detective! The very man of all others he would have selected as his cat's-paw. An officer in the League he wanted to join, and more than that, he hated the very man he was after, and who was by no means an indifferent enemy to attack, being as he was at the very head of a formidable body of men.

Rogers, or Roebuck, could see his way clearly before him, and in his own mind he not only held the eleven thousand dollars clasped in his hand, but he saw the newspapers filled with the glowing account of his daring expedition and ultimate success.

"Then you will unite your fortunes with mine, eh? I may count upon you?"

"To the last gasp!"

Munger leaned forward, and in a low tone, said:

"In the event of our success, and your loyalty to my standard, I think I can safely promise you the position I now hold, which is no mean one, and with which I would be content, were it not for the fact of my hating Cran—the captain as I do."

Roebuck—as we will now continue to speak of him—although he made no remark, registered a mental note of the "Cran—" that his companion used.

"Where are your head-quarters?" he asked at length, after thanking Munger for the promised office.

"Back in the woods," was the vague response. "Time enough to know that when you get there."

"Of course—of course! 'Twas only a mere casual remark on my part."

"When will you be ready to go?"

"Now."

"Nothing to take with you?"

"Only these," and he exhibited two revolvers of a large caliber, truly ugly looking.

"Those are first class ones," said Munger, as he took them in his hand, and looked them carefully over.

"Yes—and they have stood by me more than once, I can tell you."

He spoke the truth, but not from the same standpoint which his companion understood. Many and many were the times, when in the discharge of his duties as detective, their persuasive eloquence, had helped him out of a tight place, and he depended upon them now, more than ever, for he knew that he was going to a place, where if his identity should happen by any chance to be discovered, his life would be worth no more to the men who would consider him a traitor, than is the death of a hare, to the sportsman. They would torture him for the fun of the thing, and laugh to see his agony.

Embarked upon so desperate a deed, he had tried to think of all the consequences before setting out, and the iron resolution, and dogged determination which had always been the secret of his many successes, all bespoke the fact that he would either return with the "bracelets" around Captain Ironnerve's wrists, or he would leave his bones to rot in the dense forest which he knew he would have to penetrate, before he could reach the counterfeiters' den.

Dangers had no terrors for him. Far from it! There was an excitement, a fascination, what you will, about the very word which led him to forget himself entirely in the mad ambition for success and fame.

Ah, ambition! to what lengths do you lead a man, trampling ruthlessly down friends, foes, or anything which happens to stand in your light, so that for the ultimatum you may attain the object sought.

But to what end would this element in Roebuck's nature lead him? To his death? or would fortune prove herself more kind, and pilot him on to greater ends than his fondest dreams could realize?

Time, that great prophet of all circumstance, the monarch supreme of destiny, will determine.

CHAPTER XXII.

TAKING THE OATH.

For a long time the detective and Munger continued their conversation, and before they left the apartment they had finished the bottle,

called for another and finished half of that. True, considerable of Roebuck's portion had found its way to the cuspidore at his side, but then, the counterfeiter was in blissful ignorance of this fact, so it made no difference.

Their talk had been so satisfactory to both parties that each felt like embracing the other, for his kindness and consideration, but neither being demonstrative, they refrained.

After a few more preliminaries had been arranged, they left the saloon, and in good disguises, sought the railroad station, and by midnight, found themselves in the immediate vicinity of the Counterfeiters' Den.

When still some distance from the entrance Munger paused, and said:

"According to the rules, I will be obliged to blindfold you now, as you will not be permitted to know the exact locality of our headquarters, until after your initiation, which, by the way, is quite a serious ceremony, and you had better brace your nerves a little for the ordeal."

"My nerves are all right. Don't allow that to worry you, I beg."

Munger placed a bandage over Roebuck's eyes, and when assured that it was an impossibility for him to discern any object whatever, took him by the arm and led him to the hut, where we have already described Crandyl's entrance, accompanied by his dogs.

The pass-word, "Lodging," was twice repeated, in due form, and Munger soon led his companion into the press-room.

"Stop work, boys," he said. "I've got a man to initiate as a member of our League. Get all together and repair to the council chamber in due form of initiation. No necessity to send for the captain, as I will conduct the ceremony myself."

There was a general bustle—a murmur of approval as they went to obey the order of their sub-chief, and Roebuck found himself standing alone in the center of the room, Munger having left his side.

Surely it was rather a ticklish position in which to place a man. Alone, with his eyes bandaged—in a den filled by men who held life as but a drop in the bucket. What his thoughts were he would not even admit to himself, but he was nerve to the core, and calmly awaited the next move.

He had remained in the same attitude motionless, for perhaps ten minutes, when some one gave him a violent push from behind, and which threw him headlong into a blanket, evidently spread out to receive him. This was rapidly wound round and round him, and then he was lifted bodily from the floor and borne away.

He felt that they carried him through a long passage, and when finally they paused, unrolled him from the blanket, and unbandaged his eyes, he witnessed a sight which he had often read of, and sometimes heard told about, but which he never expected to realize.

He stood in the middle of a room about forty feet square. The four walls were completely covered by some black texture—paper-muslin he learned afterward, with the glossy side out—and suspended in all the fantastic shapes imaginable were white and bleached bones, jaw-bones of horses and asses; human skulls—which they had no doubt stolen from some vault or churchyard—were arranged in horrible pattern in every direction, while wild, weird pictures and drawings in white stood out in bold relief against the intensely black background. At one end of the room was a high desk not unlike the bench of a court-room, which was also covered with a black cloth, in the center of which a skull and cross-bones was worked in flaming red. At each end of the desk stood a grinning skeleton, strung together in some inexplicable manner, and in the extended right hand of each was a burning candle, held aloft as if to light the spectator to his doom. The floor of the place, which was of stone, reminded one of the catacombs, so strewn was it with bones, white and bleached, of probably every kind of animal and human which the State afforded. Along each side of the room were arranged twenty-six chairs of the color of vermilion—thirteen on each side—and in each chair was sitting a man, gotten up after the style of Mephistopheles—entirely of the color of the chair, while over the head of each man burned a light, enveloped in a blood-red globe.

Behind the desk, in a high chair, sat the master of ceremonies. His dress was made of a peculiar pattern, being a tight-fitting suit of black, ribbed and set off with ribs of white silk or satin, cut to represent human bones, so

that in reality, in that weird light, he looked a veritable living skeleton. Upon his head was a crown, representing an enormous copperhead snake, coiled and ready to strike, and in his right hand he held a long polished rod of steel. Immediately at his elbow was a black dwarf, who looked as though he might be one of Satan's imps, and he was dressed merely in a tight-fitting suit of black. In front of the desk, on the floor, was something covered by a white cloth, but what it was Roebuck could not imagine.

To say that he was not startled when the bandage was removed from his eyes would be telling an untruth, but being a man without nerves, almost, he quickly recovered himself, and looked as calmly upon the scene as though it was of every-day occurrence. True, he felt a chill creep up and down his back—and who wouldn't?—but it lasted only an instant, and then he felt his courage come back to him, and he was ready to face anything. Besides, the thought struck him that this was only their form of initiation tempered to try the nerves of the recruit.

Slowly the master rose from his chair.

"Philip Roebuck," he said, in a deep bass voice, "you wish to become a member of the Independent League?"

"I do." The answer was firm and clear, without the shadow of a quiver in the detective's voice as he spoke.

"Are you prepared to take the oath of allegiance?"

"I am."

"You know the penalty of breaking that oath?"

"I can surmise it," and Roebuck smiled grimly.

"Tell him what it is, friends," said the master to those assembled.

"Death—horrible death!" came unanimously from the twenty-six voices.

"As I thought," assented Roebuck.

"Once more; are you prepared to take the oath?"

"I am."

"Let the oath be administered in due form, then."

The twenty-six men rose silently and with one accord from their seats, and advanced to the center of the room, until they formed a complete circle around the detective, then, at the word "Draw!" each man drew a long, gleaming rapier from their sheaths, and placed the points, sharp as needles, against his body.

Not a word was spoken.

The master came from behind his desk, and attaching a small wire to the rod in his hand, handed it to Roebuck.

"Hold that in your hand," he said. "To the other end of the wire you perceive connected to it is attached an electric battery. The current will be turned on gradually, but will slowly become stronger and more powerful. If you can bear the full force I shall give you without flinching, it will be known that you possess sufficient nerve to become one of us; but if you flinch—and you have gone too far to draw back now—if you allow the shock to move you in any way, the twenty-six swords which you perceive about you will simultaneously pierce your heart. Do you understand me?"

"I do."

"Then turn on the current!"

Roebuck felt a slight shock rush through his body, and he smiled to think how faint was its beginning, but he did not know what he would have to endure before it was over. Gradually it grew stronger, and he began to feel a twitching in his muscles, but he braced his nerves and resisted it.

Stronger and stronger! His teeth were shut tightly together, and his brow wrinkled in the great exertion of his will.

Stronger, and still stronger! One arm was bent over behind the shoulder, and each wrist looked as though broken, so cramped and out of place were they, and still he moved not.

Stronger yet! The agony seemed more than he could bear, and yet he knew, to move, meant certain death. The cords of his limbs felt as though they were ready to snap beneath the tremendous strain placed upon them, and the veins in his forehead stood out like great purple whip-cords.

Still stronger! "Oh, God! will they never desist?" he thought, for human endurance could not bear much more. From the warm glow which pervaded him when he first began to feel the flow of the current, his temperature

had changed to a cold, intense, and frigid iciness. Still he stood his ground.

A murmur of approval went the rounds.

"Four points stronger than any one has ever taken in this room," said one, in a low tone to his neighbor, but so low that Roebuck could not hear him.

Stronger—stronger—still stronger! Roebuck's eyes were staring straight before him, but they looked sightless. He seemed to be raised nearly from his feet as the last shock was applied, and with one accord the rapiers were lowered, and the men drew back. Then the current was suddenly turned off. For a moment the detective's body shivered as though freezing, then with a hollow groan he sunk in an inanimate heap to the floor.

Several rushed forward and raised him, while restoratives were applied, while one and all looked upon him with mingled respect and admiration, for never had a member borne such a strain before.

Slowly Philip came to himself, but weak and helpless from the great strain he had undergone, but when asked if he was ready to proceed, he smiled and nodded his head.

"Very well, repeat after me," and this is the oath sworn to, every word rearticulated, though in a weak tone by Philip.

"I swear, by all the powers of good and evil; by all the things I hold most dear in Heaven or Hell; to forever uphold the Independent League—obeying their rules as now laid down; giving them all the assistance in my power, even to the forfeiture of my life in case of need. I will never prove false to my oath, and will forever obey the commands of the captain. This oath is good for my natural lifetime, and should I break it, may the curse of God light upon me, forever and ever."

Will he keep it? We will see.

After signing the roll in blood, drawn from his own arm, he was led away and put to bed.

And the League returned to their work, satisfied that they had secured a valuable colleague, and a man of indomitable will.

CHAPTER XXIII.

RALPH IN DANGER.

WHEN Dick Prince left the presence of Lillian Leonard, he wended his way straight to the depot, and purchased a ticket for Richmond, determined to return and do all he could toward the recapture of the supposed Captain Ironnerve.

With this object in view, he was not long in traversing the distance between the Richmond depot, and police head-quarters.

Arrived there, he reported to the "chief" that he had been employed jointly, by several banking firms, to do all that he could toward the recapture of the noted counterfeiter, and in the event of his being dead, which, he said, was not believed, it was his duty to become able to certify to that fact. He wished to make a note of all the points the chief could give him, and to that end, had come straight to him.

Now Prince was well known throughout all the force, as one of the sharpest, shrewdest detectives in the profession, and the man to whom he applied, did not for a moment doubt the veracity of the applicant. Accordingly, the book was taken from its shelf and "Section 1344" handed him.

It contained a minute description of Ralph Gordon, omitting no particular which might prove useful in the search for him. Height, complexion, color of eyes and hair, voice, carriage, gait, and attitudes in which he was accustomed to place himself; all were given with such a degree of correctness, that Ralph's astonishment would have been very great, could he have seen it.

Prince's eyes snapped, as he read. He knew then, what his game would be.

Although he knew that Ralph Gordon was not Captain Ironnerve, he argued, that if he could put his hands upon him and deliver him into the clutches of the law, he would have no chance to come between himself and Lillian—at least until they were man and wife.

"It's rather tough to send him to prison for a crime he never committed," thought Prince, who, at heart was really a good fellow, but so inordinately selfish, that all the better impulses of his nature were eaten up by the mad desire, and unconscionable pleasure in pushing himself to the front, irrespective of the rights

of others, so long as they interfered in any way, with the carrying out of his own ideas and aims.

"But I see no other way in which I can possibly fix it," he mused on, after once more reading the description through. "That is, unless he conveniently turns up his toes, or that bullet of Skroogs did send him to his last account. Yes—yes! I'll have to do it, I'm afraid," and he sighed as you or I would sigh over a bitter dose of medicine, forgotten ten minutes after it is swallowed.

How much more wicked is he, who does a wrong or sinful action deliberately; knowing that the right is as easy of accomplishment, and having the requisite ability to define the true difference of the terms, than he, who upon the impulse of a moment, commits a deed for which, even though undiscovered, he does penance the remainder of his life. The person who deliberates calmly between the two paths—the straight, and the crooked—and finally inconsistently selects the latter, should be punished ten times more, than the one, who perhaps commits the very same offense against the laws of God and man, upon the sudden impulse of a thoughtless moment. The one is a sinner against all the laws that apply to humanity, or in any way govern the actions of mankind, serving to carry out the desires and aims of the Almighty according to the best conception we can put upon them. The other is a sinner, chiefly against himself, oppressing others with the force of his wrongdoing, only in the abstract. Even the law—arbitrary as it is—recognizes this distinction, but not sufficiently for the safety of mankind in general.

Thus it was with Dick Prince; at heart a good fellow enough, but, filled with a sudden desire for gain, given him by the embarrassments that were crowding in upon him, he could stifle all the better thoughts of his soul, and calmly deliberate upon the most horrible kind of murder with which humanity was ever scourged.

At last, having noted down with all care such facts as would be useful to him in his search, he left the head-quarters of police and betook himself in the direction of the prison.

In a short time he had found Bernard Skroogs, and, leading him off to one side, said:

"I suppose you recollect the night on which the counterfeiter captain escaped, do you not?"

"I reckon I do—yes; what of it?"

"I want you to give me the particulars of that event as correctly as you can."

"Say, mister, who be you, anyway?"

Prince showed his badge.

"Oh!" said Skroogs upon seeing that. "All right. What do you want to know?"

"Everything that you can tell me."

"Well, that's precious little, unless you want his description, and I reckon I can give that as good as the next one."

"I've got all that," said Prince a little impatiently. "Commence at the night of the escape."

"I reckon there ain't much to tell, then. As soon as the alarm was given we all rushed to that side of the prison, and, when I saw he would get away scot free, I jest drew a bead on 'im, that's all."

"Are you sure you struck him?"

"Am I sure? Jumpin' catamount! Of course I'm sure. I never missed a mark in my life!"

"Where do you think your bullet struck him?"

"Now look here, my covey!" said Skroogs clinchingly. "I don't think anything about it: I know where it struck him."

"Where?"

"Exactly on the spot I aimed at."

"Where was that?"

"In the heart, and I'll bet four to one you'd see a right smart hole through that article, if you had it in your hand."

"You're sure of this?"

"Damn it, man! didn't I see him chuck his arms over his head, and conflux in the bottom of the boat?"

"To be sure—to be sure! I had forgotten that," and Prince smiled at the inordinate conceit in the keeper, forgetting that his own was fully as great.

After questioning the man considerably more, he finally took his leave, and hastening across the city, reached his own apartments, and seating himself, proceeded to study out the matter, as was always his habit, when undertaking a difficult task.

There was no mistaking the fact that he was one of the shining lights of his profession, judging from a purely professional standpoint, and when he once set his mind to study out any particular question he always found it very fertile in deducing conclusions of cause and effect.

"Let me see," he mused. "This Ralph Gordon was arrested upon two charges; the murder of Paul Leonard, and as being the captain of a gang of counterfeiters, and was innocent of both. He escaped—probably through the assistance of that prison boy, Mosquito. Hum! how did he escape? Not a thing was changed in the appearance of the cell, therefore there must be some secret entrance to it, although the officials claim that the lad must have secured keys in some manner. We will say, for the sake of argument, that there was a secret passage beneath the floor; this passage must necessarily lead to the river, for there is where they first discovered him.

"Now who was it in the boat besides the two fugitives? Why! some one who was interested in his safety. Now who stands in that category? The counterfeiters themselves. Hearing that Captain Ironnerve was arrested—he mayhap not having been seen by them for several days, they naturally set about taking means for his deliverance from limbo.

"Good! they too have doubtlessly used their sophistry upon Mosquito, as they call the lad, and have not discovered their mistake until he was free, then thinking he might as well have the game as the name, they have taken him away, and if he is not dead, initiated him as one of their gang.

"Is he dead? Question! I think he is, or it strikes me he would have made some noise ere this, unless he has become a member of the gang, which I think is doubtful.

"Now I can deduce two conclusions.

"First: He escaped the bullet of Skroogs's rifle, and being taken among the counterfeiters—I think I may settle on that—has been importuned by them, and finally become a member, at least for some length of time.

"Second: He is dead, and if so, I must find it out. That's settled.

"Now, how am I to do it?

"I might join the gang, but the game is hardly worth the powder. I think I'll use up a day or two just strolling around, and seeing what I can pick up."

Having settled in his mind what course to pursue, he rose and walked to the window, but he paused and looked intently for a moment, and then exclaimed:

"Mosquito, by all that's lucky! I'll just shadow you, my boy, and I have a fancy you'll lead me to Ralph Gordon."

It was but a moment before he was in the street, and upon the side opposite to the one on which Mosquito was walking, he strolled carelessly along, as if actuated by no motive in particular, but all the time keeping a careful watch upon the boy he was following.

A long distance was traversed in this way, and at last Mosquito turned down a side street and disappeared in a commonplace looking house.

"So—so!" muttered Prince. "My lambs are in the fold, but the wolves will soon come, and leaping the fence, will bear you away as their legitimate prey," and turning upon his heel, he strode away.

When Mosquito entered the house, he paused just inside the door, and holding it so he could see into the street by means of a slight crack, he too muttered:

"I know you, Dick Prince, if you are disguised, an' I know you've been follerin' me fur a right smart distance, but, my covey, a skeeter kin see in the dark, and when you ketch one dozin', jest smash 'im, 'cause 'tain't often you'll do it."

He watched Prince until he had turned the corner, then left the house, and hurrying through the street, sprung upon a car, and in an hour's time was in an entirely different portion of the city.

Mosquito, although a boy, had proved himself not deficient in cuteness.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CATCH A WEASEL ASLEEP!

PRINCE went straight to the nearest police station, and having secured the assistance of several men, returned to the house he had seen

Mosquito enter, and rung the bell, or the apology for one, which amounted to the same thing.

The ring was answered by a buxom lass of about thirteen, who stared hard through the half-open door, and at last asked him what he wanted.

"There is a friend of mine stopping here, I think," he said. "A young man of about your own age, or a little older, with red hair. He goes by the name of Mosquito."

"There's no such person here," was the reply.

"Oh, yes there is, my dear; and I am very anxious to see him. The fact is, he ran away from home, and his mother is very sick and wants to see him."

He thought he could open the girl's heart by speaking thus of an imaginary mother, but she appeared obdurate, and only responded:

"I tell you, sir, there is no one here that you want to see, unless it is my mother, and she's sick and can't see you."

"Don't you keep boarders?" asked Prince, rather perplexed.

"No, sir, we don't!"

"I'll have to show my colors," muttered the detective to himself, and turning up the lap of his vest, he displayed his badge, and said:

"I am an officer, young lady, and I must see the person I mentioned, whom I know to be in this house, for I saw him enter."

"He ain't here, I tell you," said the girl, "and you mustn't disturb my mother, for she's awful sick."

Prince pondered a moment.

There was a ring of truth in the girl's eyes, which made him rather at a loss, but he argued that Mosquito must be there, and this girl and her mother were only carrying out some plan for his protection, so crowding past her, he said:

"I'm sorry to trouble you, my dear, but I must do my duty, and search the house, so stand aside, and let me pass."

But the little girl was plucky.

"No, sir!" she exclaimed. "You sha'n't disturb my ma'ma; she's sick, I tell you, and if you don't go right out and 'tend to your own business, I'll call a policeman, and then see if you won't."

For reply, Prince stepped to the door and blew a small whistle which he always carried with him, and almost in an instant four uniformed men were touching their caps to him.

"Here are some policemen, my dear," he said with delicate irony, "and as I am one myself, perhaps now you will let us search the house."

"I ain't your dear!" she snapped, tears coming into her eyes in her anger, "and I think you're real mean to come here and make my ma'ma worse with all your noise," but notwithstanding this appeal, Prince, who was satisfied that his game was concealed in the house, brushed past her, and walked up the stairs, after telling his men how to distribute themselves.

To make a long story short, they searched the house everywhere, but as the reader knows, without avail, and it was with feelings better imagined than described, that Prince, and his men, once more found themselves in the street, though with much satisfaction to the thirteen year-old young lady, who had so determinedly combated their desire to search the house.

While he was still standing there, undecided what course to pursue, a young gamin ran up to him and said:

"Be your name Prince?"

"Yes, my lad; what do you want?"

"Ere's a piece of paper I war telled to guv yer," and the boy stuck out his dirty paw, and handed the detective a paper, equally as dirty, on which was printed (for Mosquito could not write) the following message:

"OLD KUS!

"You be A Smart men Ain't you i Saw you but you didnt nAw it. Ketch me ef you Kin.

"MosQUITO."

The language used by Prince upon reading the above message, was of such a nature, that I would not dare to transcribe it for the benefit of those who read. Suffice it to say that he used many biblical quotations, without regard to quantity or quality.

Seizing the messenger by the collar he shook him, as a dog would shake a cat.

"Where did you get this?" he asked savagely.

"A—young—feller—guv—it—ter—me!" gasped the boy, frightened almost out of his wits at this harsh treatment, where he had confidently expected a dime or a quarter.

"Tell me about it," continued the detective in a kinder tone. "Be careful to forget nothing, and if you give me any information which will be of service, I will give you a quarter."

The boy scratched his shaggy head.

He wanted badly to get his little fingers upon the quarter in question, but he was very much afraid that he could tell nothing which would influence the man before him to extend the desired quantity. Still, like most boys, born in a gutter and brought up on kicks and blows, he was sharp, and seldom without a resource, and his eyes flashed as a sudden idea struck him.

"It was down there," he said. "I see'd the young feller comin' 'long jest ez I struck a feller for a job shinin' his brogans. 'Is nobs kim smack to me, an' he sez, sez he, 'Snipy, wanter finger a bob?' 'I does,' sez I, an' he guv me thet 'ere paper, an' sez 'e, 'Shin down an' squat in front of 45. 'Purty soon you'll see a feller kim along o' sum cops. 'E'll go inter the house, an' when 'e kims out give 'im this 'ere.'"

"Is that all he said to you?"

"Yeup; only I knowed 'im, an' ef yer want 'im fur anything pertickler, I'm the cove as kin guv yer a steer."

"Excellent!" exclaimed Prince. "Here is your quarter, and if you find him for me I'll give you a dollar—no, I'll make it two dollars," and he handed the boy the silver piece, much to the latter's gratification, who stuck it in his pocket after sounding it thoroughly upon the pavement to be sure of its quality.

The detective, after telling his men that they might return to the station, told the boy to lead the way, and together they started down the street.

The gamin was eagerly looking for a chance to get away, for truth to tell, he did not know Mosquito from Hamlet's ghost, and having made his quarter, his greatest desire, to use his own expression, was to "slope."

The two dollars which the detective had offered him had, however, made its impression, and, feeling sure that he would know the party, Mosquito, should he ever see him again, he was resolved to try; that is, to keep a watch in his daily travels about the streets, which were generally extended.

To this end he paused, and, turning to Prince, said:

"Say, boss, do yer think I kin see 'ith my eyes open?"

"Shouldn't be particularly astonished, as I know of, if you could," replied the detective, sententiously.

"Do yer think yer kud trust me?"

"I never trust anybody."

"What, nev—that is—yer don't?"

"No, not in things that amount to anything. Occasionally I do in minor affairs. Why do you ask?"

"I want yer to let me find this fellar alone, and then fetch yer to him; will yer?"

"How do I know you'll not deceive me? You may even now be a friend of his."

"I ain't—honest Injun! Yer promised me two dollars ef I'd tree the 'coon, an', boss, I'm goin' ter do it!"

"Why don't you want me along?"

"'Cause I don't know jest where ter fin' 'im now, but I do know where ter look fur him; besides, he knows you."

"That's true, my lad. Well, you find him, and as soon as you have succeeded, come to my rooms," and Prince gave the boy his address. "You will find me there, and then, instead of two dollars, I will give you ten. Is it a bargain?"

"Yer kin bet yer boots 'tis!"

"All right—good-by!"

"Tra-la-la-lee!"

Then they separated, each taking a different direction; Prince back to his rooms, and Snipy, the boy, to proceed in his search for Mosquito.

We will follow Snipy, who strolled leisurely along, working the problem in his mind how best to find the requisite party, and thereby earn the required—or much-wished-for—ten dollars.

For several hours he wended his way about the streets, occasionally shining a pair of soiled boots for some pedestrian, and when it was nearly dark, and he was just about giving up the chase for the remainder of that day, he

espied the one he was looking for in the act of dropping a letter in a mail-box.

Hurrying forward, he planted himself alongside of Mosquito.

"Hullo, Skoopendyke!" he exclaimed.

"Hullo yerself!" was the rather unsatisfactory response. "What do you want? I ain't got any boots to shine."

"Who said yer had? Don't yer know me?"

"Yes. You're the covey that guv Prince my note, ain't ye?"

"Perzackly!"

"What did his nobs say? Rather r'iled, eh?"

"I reckon!"

"What did he say?"

"He wants ter see yer."

"Yer don't say so!"

"I do though!"

"Tell him I'm sorry I can't oblige him, but there are others who love me better, an' I never did fancy him," and Mosquito turned on his heel, and started down the street, but only to find that Snipy had turned also, and was hastening along at his side.

Mosquito turned, and looking the boot-black square in the eye, said:

"See here, young feller; you're too fresh! I don't want any company where I'm goin' now, an' if you insist 'pon comin' you'll do it with a spoiled phiz, that's all."

"Don't yer try ter foller me either," as the boy turned grumbling away, "cause if you do, I'll slug ye wuss than ever!" and Mosquito with a disdainful air, proceeded on his way.

CHAPTER XXV.

A WARNING LETTER.

CRANDYL, after leaving the den, hastened along the path to Laurel Lodge.

He felt strangely worried, and nervous, though why, he could not tell. The presence of Philip Roebuck seemed to add fuel to the fire, and yet there was nothing in that which should be calculated to weigh him down so; that is, as far as he could see.

All his questions had been responded to in an admirable way, and without a moment's hesitation, but still, despite the numberless assurances of everything being right and proper, Crandyl could not get it out of his head that Roebuck's presence would eventually work him some kind of harm. He liked his appearance, and when he remembered the fifty-dollar-bill that Munger had shown him, he realized that he was a valuable adjunct.

As soon as he reached his room at Laurel Lodge, he rung the bell, and then, after partaking of a biscuit, and a cup of coffee, proceeded to read his letters, which had arrived the night before, but which he had neglected to read.

Several were opened, read, and laid carelessly aside, with some comment or other, but at last he opens one, begins to read, stops, brushes back the hair from his forehead and commences again.

For the benefit of the reader we will produce a copy of this letter. It ran thus:

"GORDON CRANDYL, Esq.—

alias CAPTAIN IRONNERVE:

"You will perceive upon the receipt of this, that notwithstanding your superhuman efforts to the contrary, I am still ranked among the living, and more than that, I am in a sure and safe retreat. Perhaps I am indiscreet in sending you this, but your life has usually run so smooth and even that I cannot resist the temptation of ruffling it a little, and I think I will succeed in doing so before you have finished the perusal of this letter. The fact that I am not only alive, but at liberty, must alarm you somewhat when you stop to think of the long account I have to settle with you and which you must pay me the full interest upon. It may surprise you somewhat, to think I know your *alias* so well. By the way! How many have you got? Unfortunately I only know this one, but like our costumes, I suppose names are handy; one for each character, you know. I must compliment you upon your success in having me arrested for your own villainy, but, my dear sir, why did you not keep me there, or put me out of the way as effectually as you did Paul Leonard? for I fancy you either killed him, or was the means of his death—which? But I did not commence this letter for the purpose of telling you of your own villainy, but what I intend doing about it. You of course are aware of the fact that I dare not go to the authorities with my grievances, for they would only jug me for my pains, but this I can do: *Hunt you down, Gordon Crandyl, and just so sure as there is a God above me, I will do it.* I cannot send any one after you, but I can come myself, and you may look for me shortly after you read this. You have often praised my strength of character to others—now you will have an opportunity of testing it. My muscles are hardly as strong as they were before I was wounded, but despite the fact of your being Captain Ironnerve, I think I can still throw you into the corner as easily as I did upon an occasion which you no doubt remember. You may look for me soon, and when I come, I warn you, be prepared to receive me."

"RALPH GORDON."

"Curse you!" exclaimed Crandyl, after reading Ralph's letter through to the end. "Curse you! I *will* be prepared, and in such a manner as you won't suspect, my beauty. Come right along; you'll find for once, that Ironnerve meant something, or I'm mistaken!"

He rung the bell so sharply, that the valet's face was almost pale, when he poked it in the door.

"Have my breakfast prepared—and a good one too!" ordered Crandyl. "And tell Lady Lorna that I desire her to eat it with me."

The automaton of a man disappeared, and Crandyl, in his perturbation, commenced pacing back and forth, back and forth, from one end of his room to the other.

"Confound all the Gordon family, say I!" he muttered through his locked teeth. "One and all of you have stood in my way, all my life, not forgetting Tom Gordon, who thank fortune, is out of my way at last."

"I thought to make Ralph my tool," he mused on, "but he's got that infernal conscience which has troubled the whole lot of them, and which one could not break with a sixty-pound sledge. I'll make him sorry though if he comes near me—by Heaven, I will! No, no, Ralphie, I won't hand you over to the police; I'll tend to *you* myself, and I think there are tortures enough in the cavern that we use for traitors sometimes, to make you heartily wish you had remained in prison."

Thus delivering himself, he started for the dining-room, where he found Lorna waiting for him.

When he entered the room where Lorna was, his face had assumed its usual expression, except that the self-satisfied smile that was habitually about the corners of his mouth made itself more prominent than usual.

"How is my little girl this morning?" he asked, cheerily, for Crandyl, notwithstanding his many faults, loved the child—or the one he supposed her to be—very dearly.

"Very well," she replied.

Let it not be wondered that Crandyl, being as fond of the real Lady Lorna as he was, was thus easily deceived. Place the two together, dressed exactly alike, and even then a person who had perhaps known them both all their lives would find it a hard matter to decide which was which. But separate them, and it was an impossibility, unless one should question them, and then Lady Lorna's superior education would soon determine.

But why was this not noticeable to Gordon Crandyl?

It was. But was laid at the door of the fact of her having been out of her mind for a time, and it was not expected that she would recover in a day, a week, or perhaps not in a month.

Thus it can plainly be seen how easy it was to deceive him, who was generally so clear-sighted.

They seated themselves at the breakfast-table, and the meal commenced.

"Don't you ever wonder what has become of Ralph?" asked Gordon, at length.

"I do, rather," replied Lorna, who did not know who in the world he was talking about, but realized that a half-acquiescence was the best policy, inasmuch as she was obliged to say something.

Crandyl had carefully kept the papers from her, for he knew that Lady Lorna rather favored his enemy, and he had no fancy for being "hailed over the coals" by a woman.

"I just had a letter from him this morning," he said, by way of continuance.

"Yes! May I read it?"

"I think not. You know he went up to Richmond for a few days, and he writes me that he is having such a glorious time that it may be several weeks before his return."

"What is he doing there?" The question was the only one she could think of, so she asked it.

"I don't know exactly," was the reply. "But judging from the tone of his letter, I should say that some lady had succeeded in interesting him at least," and Crandyl watched his companion narrowly as he said this, but although she noticed the look, she did not know its root.

"How indifferent you have grown all of a sudden!" exclaimed the man, perplexed, but unconsciously pleased that she was not so much enamored as he thought. "I fancied you were in love with him once."

"I?" and Lorna laughed pleasantly.

"Yes, you! Were you not?"

"Don't ask foolish questions, uncle," she

said petulantly, and his hopes went down to earth again, for he once more thought she loved him.

"Oh, very well! if the subject is painful to you, I have no particular desire to keep it up," he said. "Only I wondered that you had never asked for him, or manifested any surprise at his absence."

Lorna smiled, meaningly.

"I thought if he cared to have me know of his whereabouts he would write, and although I think he has been quite long enough about it, still, at last he has done so. I too received a letter from him."

"You—from Ralph Gordon! What did he say?" and Crandyl sprang to his feet, livid with passion, and then sunk back again into his chair.

"Would you like to read it?" smiled Lorna.

"But what excites you so?"

"Nothing—nothing! Er—er—the—ahem!—the fact is, he promised me he would not write to you while he was away, er—I—that is— Yes, I would like to read it."

"It is in my room. I'll get it for you after breakfast."

"Can't John or your maid get it?"

"No; she could not find it. Have patience, uncle."

The information that Ralph had written to Lorna, had completely unstrung Crandyl's nerves, but as soon as he began to think it over he knew that there could be nothing in the letter to affect him or Lorna would have spoken of it, and then, besides—and he almost blushed as he thought it—he knew the man too well.

With an effort he changed the subject, and in this way, indifferent topics were discussed during the remainder of the meal.

It was nearly finished, and the two were about to leave the table, when there was a noise of the opening and shutting the outside door, closely followed by that of the room they were in, and with a pleasant "good-morning," a bow, and a smile, Ralph Gordon strode boldly into the room.

CHAPTER XXVI.

IRONNERVE AT BAY.

WITH a cry such as a wild beast might give, Gordon Crandyl sprang to his feet and confronted Ralph, but the latter only put out his hand, and looked him meaningly in the eye, as if to say: "Let us be diplomatic before her," and Crandyl both understood and appreciated.

After greeting Crandyl, as though they were upon the best of terms with each other, Ralph walked over to Lorna, remarking as he did so:

"You're looking as well as usual, Lorna, and yet I fancy there is some change since I saw you last; what is it?"

"I have been very ill," she replied.

"That is unfortunate. What seems to be the trouble?"

Lorna told the story of being lost in the woods, as she had previously manufactured it, and all the while wondering what was between the Lady Lorna and the man before her, for she had begun to take a great interest in the part she was playing, and did not care to have the deception discovered.

During the recital Crandyl had several times glanced furtively in the direction of the bell, but each time, as he was on the point of ringing, Ralph's eyes would warn him to desist.

It was strange—this fear that Crandyl felt for Ralph, for he was a man generally understood to be of iron nerve, afraid of nothing, but there was something in the cold gray eyes of the man he had wronged that actually made the counterfeiter captain shiver, though why he could not have told.

At last, after some time had been passed over in useless conversation, Crandyl rose, and asking Ralph to follow, led the way to his room.

There was a wicked smile upon his face as he locked the door after he and Ralph had entered, but the latter either did not see it, or thought it unworthy of notice.

Soon both were seated, Ralph idly lighting a cigar and putting his feet upon an extra chair, in the most indifferent manner possible.

"You're pluckier than I thought, Ralph Gordon," said Crandyl, by way of opening the conversation.

"Yes?" responded Ralph. "I wish I might say the same of you, Captain."

Crandyl's eyes gleamed wickedly, and his face grew even paler than before at the irony of his companion, but he controlled himself, and said:

"What do you propose to do?"

Ralph smiled.

"That depends chiefly upon yourself," he said. "For Lorna's sake—not for your own, mind you—but for her I would spare—if I could, but there is only one condition under which I will consent to do so."

"And that is—"

"One which I am almost certain you will not accept, else perhaps I would not so readily offer it."

"At least let me have the pleasure of hearing it," said Crandyl sarcastically, and he bent forward and carelessly pulled out a drawer in the stand at his side, but a sharp exclamation from Ralph caused him to look quickly up, and to find the muzzle of a revolver pointing at him, the hammer of the weapon raised, and Ralph's finger upon the trigger.

"No funny business, if you please, Mr. Ironnerve," said Ralph, coldly. "Do me the favor to close that drawer, lock it, and give me the key."

Crandyl's eyes fairly blazed beneath this fresh taunt, but he saw that his companion meant just what he said, and then there is an immense amount of persuasion in the argument used, particularly when one knows that the person using it is not particular whether he pulls the trigger or not. Accordingly, the counterfeiter did as he was told, and Ralph slipped the key into his vest-pocket.

"Clubs are trumps, you see," he remarked, calmly, as he did so, "and I hold both bowers and the joker, so you had better throw down your hand."

"You forget there may be another deal," said Crandyl, icily.

"Oh, no I don't! But the next deal belongs to me. You had yours, and were euchered, and, unfortunately for you, I do not make such mistakes when I throw out the cards," and Ralph laughed pleasantly.

"Come, come!" exclaimed Crandyl, trying his best to smother his rage. "This is no time for jesting. Let me hear that condition."

"As you please. In the first place, you must write out a full confession of your villainy, sign it, and give it to me to do with it as I think fit. Secondly, you must leave this country for some foreign shore, other than England, and never return here again; and thirdly, you must deliver the gang of which you are the head up to justice."

"Is that all?" sarcastically.

"No. You must leave Lorna behind."

"For what, pray?"

"Because I demand it; that is sufficient reason, I think."

Crandyl sprung to his feet with an oath, but Ralph's revolver was once more looking him in the face, and he said, coldly:

"Sit down, captain; don't get excited over trifles."

"Curse you!" muttered the counterfeiter, as he complied, but Ralph only smiled, as he said:

"'Curses,' you know, 'are like young chickens; they generally come home to roost.'"

"Do you think I am such a coward then," asked Crandyl, "as to grant, without question, everything you are pleased to request? I admit that you have got the drop on me now, but the worst you can do is to kill me, and I'd a darn sight rather you would than that I should betray my companions."

"There's a doughty old maxim
Which no one believes;—
That there is some honor
Even 'mong thieves."

hummed Ralph, and Crandyl once more sprung to his feet, and leaped toward his tormentor, but only to feel the steel-like gripe of Ralph's fingers about his throat, and the cold muzzle of the revolver pressed against his forehead.

"Gordon Crandyl, if you don't sit still, I swear I'll kill you. We're playing for high stakes and I'm bound to win at any cost," and Ralph pushed him back violently into his chair, where he sat panting, and glaring at his enemy, like a caged tiger.

"Do your worst, Ralph Gordon!" he exclaimed, "but I will not betray my friends."

"Will you comply with the remainder of my conditions, omitting that one, then?"

"No!"

"You won't?"

"No!"

Ralph raised the revolver, and pointed it straight between Crandyl's eyes.

"Is that decision final?" he asked, looking sternly at the counterfeiter.

"Yes!"

The answer was firm, but Crandyl shivered as he spoke, expecting confidently, that the next moment would find him a corpse, but Ralph only lowered his weapon, and looked wonderingly at the man.

"Gritty!" he murmured. "Gritty to the core!"

"Yes, gritty, when I look that kind of death in the face for it is much easier than the one I will eventually have to meet, I am afraid."

"Ralph," and his tone changed as he continued. "I would give everything I possess to recall the last twenty years of my life, but it is past—the scenes have been enacted, and God himself could not wipe them from the years I have lived. Do you think I have no conscience? that the crimes I have committed do not weigh me down like tons of lead, until the life I lead is a very hell on earth? Night after night I have paced up and down this room, sleepless. Time after time have I prepared a cup of poison, only to cast it away, and resolve afresh to follow the road I had traveled so long."

"If you feel so," said Ralph, touched in spite of himself, "why not do as I have suggested? Write your confession; tell your men that the gang is broken up, and let them go. God will forgive you, if you are truly penitent, and lead the remainder of your life according to his teachings. Come, Gord, let me persuade you," and Ralph bent forward eagerly, anxious to save the man before him.

Crandyl laughed. A low, mocking, despairing laugh that chilled Ralph's blood, and made him shiver.

"No—no!" he said. "It is too late now to draw back; I have built my house, and I must live in it. Pray do not think any thing of my words just now; they meant nothing. You and I are bitter enemies, and one or the other of us must die. You have the advantage of me; then why not use it, for I swear to you, if I could change places with you now, I would shoot you like a dog!"

"Shall I take you at your word?" murmured Ralph, again raising the weapon, and the thought flashed through him as he did so, that it would be a merciful action on his part.

"Yes;—do!"

The answer was distinct, but Ralph lowered his weapon.

"I can't!" he said. "It's too cold-blooded; but," he continued, and leaned a little forward to give force to his words, "unless you repent now, I'll follow you to the gallows so sure as my name is Ralph Gordon!"

In the agitation of the moment, Ralph forgot with whom he was dealing, and he arose, and walked across the room.

It was the opportunity that Crandyl wanted. Quickly and cautiously rising, he raised a stone spittoon from the floor, and taking a step forward, cast it, with all the force he could command, at Ralph.

Ralph heard the noise, and turned, but not soon enough.

The heavy missile struck him full upon the temple, and with a heavy groan, he sunk senseless to the floor.

"So much, so good!" muttered the counterfeiter captain, as he produced cords and tied his victim's feet and hands. "We'll see who holds the winning cards, my chicken! I have a fancy that I can devise some tortures that will make you groan worse than you did just now."

He threw open a closet door, and dragging the senseless body across the room, threw it inside as he would so much rubbish, then lighting a cigar, he sat down to think.

The high card had lost, for once.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ANOTHER TURN OF THE CARDS.

CRANDYL had scarcely taken his seat, and buried himself in thought, when there was a gentle knock at his door, and rising hastily he unlocked and threw it open, to find Lorna standing there.

"What do you want?" he asked, petulantly, for he was annoyed at being interrupted when he wished the most to be alone.

"I came to ask Ralph to take a walk with

me," she said. "I think you have been long enough about your business."

"Ralph has gone."

"Gone! without saying good-by?"

"I suppose so, unless he stopped on his way out."

"I don't believe he's gone!" said Lorna, and crowded into the room, making straight for the very closet where he was lying. "He's hiding somewhere to tease me."

Crandyl grasped her roughly by the arm.

"I tell you he has gone!" he said, harshly. "You had better return to your own apartments."

"But I want to see Ralph."

"He is not here."

"Then where is he?"

"Gone, I tell you!"

"Where did he go?"

"Back to Richmond."

"He has not left the house."

"How do you know that?"

"Because I have been upon the porch the whole time, and he could not have gone without my seeing him."

"He went out at the rear, by the way of the stables, that is the probable reason for your not seeing him. Come, now, return to your room, or anywhere, so that you don't disturb me for a while. I am very busy."

Lorna was forced to comply, although it was with many misgivings, for, with a strange intuition which she could not define, she had felt that the men hated each other the moment Ralph had entered the breakfast-room. The cloak of good-fellowship had been but indifferently worn by Ralph, so that she had seen through it at once in spite of his efforts to appear at ease.

"I will watch and see if he is still there," she murmured as she descended the stairs and seated herself upon the piazza. "He cannot very well leave the house without my knowing it so long as I remain here."

For fully two hours she waited for some sign. She was strangely interested in the man whom that day she had seen for the first time, and she felt one of those inexplicable impressions—presentiments—that something had happened to him, though what she could not determine.

At last there was a step in the hall, and Crandyl came out upon the veranda.

"I am going for a ride," he said, "and, as I have some business to attend to, you need not look for me back before late at night, so do not wait up for me," and with that he called his dogs, mounted his horse, and rode away.

It was a heavenly opportunity for Lorna to ascertain whether or not her impressions had been correct, and accordingly, after waiting a reasonable time for him to get far enough away, so that there was no fear of his returning, she rose and ascended the stairs to the door of Gordon Crandyl's room.

It was locked.

With an exclamation of disappointment Lorna paused and endeavored to form some plan by which she could gain access to the room, but none seemed to present itself, until suddenly she remembered a large bunch of keys which she had found among Lady Lorna's effects, and in the hope that one of those keys might open the door of Crandyl's room, she hastened to get them.

She found the keys, and quickly returning, tried them, one by one—in vain. The lock was not of that simple pattern which almost any key will work.

"There must be some way by which I can effect an entrance," she said, impatiently to herself. "Let me think."

She thought and thought, when suddenly an idea took possession of her, and without delay she proceeded to act upon it.

Once more descending the stairs, she found Crandyl's valet, and going to him, said:

"John, I have left a book that I was reading in uncle's room; is there any way by which you can get it for me?"

Now John had positive orders, not only to keep the door of Crandyl's room locked, and allow no one to enter there, but he was cautioned against entering himself unless absolutely necessary; still he did have a key.

He hesitated for some time, but Lady Lorna had ever been a favorite of the servants, and particularly since her misfortune, so at last he said he would get the book for her.

"You see, my lady," he remarked, "your uncle has given me positive orders to allow no one to enter his room in his absence, but if

you will only get the book and come right out, I will open the door—and—my lady—you will say nothing to him, will you?"

"Certainly not."

Accordingly John led the way to Crandyl's room, and they both entered.

Lorna went straight across the room, and taking down the first book she saw almost returned to the doorway where John was waiting for her.

As she reached the door she turned, and looking back into the room, said:

"I think it would make it cooler here, if those curtains were pulled down a little more," and John hastened across the room to drop them.

As soon as his back was turned, Lorna sprung the catch of the lock, so that when the door was shut only the knob-catch would work, then when John returned, she held the door open for him to pass, and closed it herself.

She had succeeded, but she must not be too hasty in making her success profitable, else John might suspect; she therefore went once more to the veranda, and seating herself, book in hand, remained there, evidently enraptured over its contents—which she was not reading—for nearly an hour, then rising, she re-entered the house and went straight to Gordon Crandyl's room, closing and locking the door after her.

"At last!" she murmured. "I outwitted John nicely. Now what is the first thing to do? I think those men had trouble and that Ralph—as he is called—is concealed in this room somewhere."

She looked toward the closet, and something seemed to whisper that he was there, but like many others, when upon the brink of discovery she hesitated to carry it out.

"Suppose he is there," she asked herself, while a strange, indefinable fear chilled her heart so that her whole body trembled as from a chill. "In what condition will I find him? Murdered perhaps!—no—no; my pseudo uncle is not—can not be so base as that! But drugged—unconscious—perhaps stunned by some blow—and bleeding!" and she shivered again.

There was a fear which she could not fathom at her heart; but one sudden recollection brought back all her courage. It was the memory of Vega's words: "Remember you are a Romany, and have no fear!"

To her there was an influence in the remembrance of that one sentence, which would have given her courage to go through fire and water. She would lay down her life willingly, at any moment, rather than think that she was in any way unworthy of the race to which she belonged. No aristocratic lord was ever prouder of his lineage than was she of her Gipsy blood, of which she possessed all the peculiarities. Those elements which prove the power of mind over matter; where the will is even stronger than the muscles, through the influence of that magnetic force which living close to nature's laws will generate.

It was the truest kind of courage that possessed her, for in her fancy every corner of the room was filled with goblins and wavering shadows, but which she would not heed although they sent an icy feeling to her heart.

He is not brave who knows no fear, for he has nothing for the will to combat and overcome, in order to do his duty. It is the feeling of almost ungovernable concern for dangers, and yet the presence of that indomitable perseverance and presence of the "I'll do it or die in trying," element that constitutes the brave man.

Napoleon, that man of unfathomable resource, was not so brave as his own Marshal Ney; and why? simply because Napoleon felt that he must, and would live until his ambition was attained, while Ney never went into a battle without expecting it would be his last; but for his country, and his beloved general, he was ready and willing to die.

Cautiously Lorna approached the closet door and turned the knob. That too, was locked, but she once more had recourse to her bunch of keys, and was at last gratified to see the door swing open before her.

Ralph Gordon laid there like one dead, with his hands and feet tightly bound.

With a cry of consternation, Lorna was quickly upon her knees at his side, her hand upon his heart.

Yes—there was a slight fluttering there.

"He is not dead; thank God!" she murmured fervently.

It was but the work of a moment to run to

the table, secure a paper-cutter, and returning, cut the cords that bound him. Then with a sponge and a basin of water, she bathed his head, and pleaded with him to open his eyes—

It was a long time before he did so, but at last there was a quivering of the lids; a deep drawn breath, and Ralph Gordon's consciousness returned.

As he opened his eyes, and saw who it was that had rescued him, he smiled.

"You, Lorna?" he said faintly—

"Yes—thank God you are alive!" and there was a depth of feeling—of pathos—of love, in her voice, which she did not know of, but Ralph felt it, and summoning all his strength, he lifted his hands, and taking the beautiful little face between them, drew it toward him, and kissed her.

And that kiss was Gipsy Lorna's fate.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IRONNERVE OUTWITTED.

It was some little time before Ralph felt able to walk, and even when he did attempt it, Lorna had to steady him, he was so weak from the effects of the terrible blow he had received.

"What are you going to do with me, little girl?" he asked, half smiling. "I am not strong enough to cope with your uncle now, so I can't remain here."

"Come to my room," she said. "You can remain there without fear of interruption, until you are stronger, and have concluded what to do," and so, leaning upon her, he went with her, although saying to himself that he would not have done so, unless stern necessity compelled.

When there, she drew the couch forward, and fixing it where the breeze would blow upon him, besought him to try and get some sleep.

There was a large contusion where the missile that Crandyl had hurled, had struck him, and his head ached terribly, but Lorna bathed the throbbing temples with cologne-water and ere long had the satisfaction of seeing him fall quietly asleep.

It was nearly dusk when he awoke, and during the whole time she had remained by his side fanning him.

Ralph was much better. He felt that his strength had returned, although his head still throbbed somewhat.

"How you have changed!" he said to Lorna. "You are not the same creature I used to know but a short time ago."

"No, I am not," she said, and she wondered if he loved the Lorna that was hidden away in the cavern.

"I wish Gordon Crandyl was not your uncle," said Ralph, after several moments of deep thought, and he was astonished to hear her reply:

"He is not."

"Not your uncle? Oh, come! why, I have known you all your life, and that is the relation he has always borne you."

Lorna hesitated.

"You—you never—saw me—before to-day," she said, brokenly, at last.

"I never—what?"

"I am not the Lorna you used to know," she sobbed.

"Not the Lorna I know! Why, child! have you taken leave of your senses? This day's excitement has been too much for you, I'm afraid."

"No—no—no! I am telling you the truth; I have been very—very wicked. Oh, forgive me—forgive me!"

"What do you mean, child?" asked Ralph, perplexed beyond measure by her words, which he could not understand.

And then Lorna, in a voice broken by sobs, told him her whole history, from the earliest day she could remember down to the scenes he had helped to enact.

Ralph's astonishment was very great, but when he saw how badly she felt, he laid his hand kindly upon her head, and said:

"Of course you have done wrong, Lorna, but I do not know as you are greatly to blame. Crandyl is evidently related to you in some manner, and I should not be surprised to find eventually that Lady Lorna and you were sisters."

"Your greatest wrong was toward her, whom you have left to the rough care of other strangers, used as she is, to every comfort that

money can buy. God grant that she is not worse off than you think."

Lorna was sobbing as though her heart would break, and when he tried to comfort her, she only sobbed the more.

"You must think me very wicked," she said between her sobs. "How can you think kindly of me again?"

"Not think kindly of one who has saved my life?" he replied, drawing her gently toward him. "Nay, more than that," he went on after a pause; "for in the time I have known you, you have wound yourself more tightly about my heart, than Lorna Atherton did in all the years we have spent in each other's society."

He kissed the tears away, and comforted her, for he was human, and her gentle yielding figure had a charm for him, that he had never felt before.

"It is your duty to right the Lady Lorna," he told her, "and I will help you to do it. Can you come with me now, and show me the Sighing Pine, as you call it? I dare not remain here, for at any moment Crandyl may return, and when he does, he will have assistance with him, so that it would be useless for me to attempt to cope with them."

"I will follow you anywhere!" she said, with much more feeling than she would have manifested, had she been reared in society, but Ralph had evidently thought better of his decision, for he said:

"No, no! Crandyl will return, and finding us both, gone, will at once come to the conclusion that you freed me; whereas, if you remain here, he will be puzzled to find me gone. To-morrow, at noon, meet me at Vega's cabin; I know where it is, and it was there that I saw you once before, but you look very different in this dress."

Once more bathing his head, Ralph boldly descended the stairs.

"Tell Mr. Crandyl," he said to John, whom he met in the hall, "that I have concluded to take the night-train for Richmond," and after having his horse saddled, he rode away down the pathway.

But he did not follow the beaten track long, for, after passing over about half a mile, he turned aside through the woods and took his way toward Vega's cabin, where he intended to pass the night and forenoon of the next day.

It was nearly midnight when Gordon Crandyl again rode up to the door of Laurel Lodge, and at his side were Jim Munger and Philip Roebuck, whom he had brought with him to convey Ralph back to the den.

John, who had orders when his master was away not to wait up for him, had long gone to his repose, so he was not there to deliver the message left by our hero.

Crandyl led the way to his room, and, when there, proceeded straight to the closet where he had left Ralph bound and helpless.

It was empty.

With a deep imprecation, Crandyl sprung back, then once more examined the impromptu prison, rubbing his eyes to make sure that he saw straight.

Yes, the closet was empty! Only the cut cords which had bound the prisoner's hands and feet together betokened the fact that the place had been tenanted.

He examined the room minutely.

Everything was as he had left it, and he swore the most terrible oaths in the excess of his disappointment.

The bell was pulled so sharply that John ran in half dressed to see what was the matter.

"Have you been in this room since I left it?" thundered Crandyl to his valet.

The poor fellow trembled with fear.

"No—sir—that is—I—I—" he stammered.

"You what!" shouted Crandyl, grasping him forcibly by the throat and choking him so he could hardly breathe. "You what, you scoundrel!"

"My lady—came—to me—and said—she—wanted—a book," gasped the poor fellow as plainly as he could, for Crandyl's fingers were choking nearly all the breath out of him.

Crandyl loosened his hold.

"How long were you in here?" he asked.

"Only long enough for her to get the book."

"Were you here all the while that she was?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you notice anything strange about the room?"

"No, sir."

"Has anything unusual happened to-day, at all?"

"Nothing, sir—only—"

"Only what? D—n you, out with it!"

"Mr. Gordon—"

"Yes—yes! what of him? Confound you, fellow—speak!"

"He came to me—"

"He *what*?"

"I met him in the hall, and he said—he said—"

"Go on—go on!"

"He said that I was to tell you that he had decided to take the night train for Richmond, and wished me to say his adieus to you, as he had not time to wait."

"Malediction!"

Crandyl's fingers were once more about his valet's throat, and he shook him as a cat shakes a mouse.

"And you let him go, you cursed fool! After all the trouble I have had with him, now, just as I get him in my clutches, you—you help him to escape me! I've a good mind to cut out your infernal tongue!"

He threw the poor fellow from him with such force that he fell, and striking his head upon the very spittoon which had dealt Ralph such a blow, lay quite still.

Then Crandyl turned to his companions.

"There has been treachery at work here somewhere," he said, "for he never could have gotten away without help, in the condition in which I left him. Roebuck, you may return to the Den, and Jim will stay with me. Something has got to be done—and at once—for on my life, Ralph Gordon means mischief!"

Roebuck started.

"Ralph Gordon—and here!" he thought. "Well, I admire his pluck."

He bowed and left the room. Springing upon his horse, he was soon passing leisurely along the avenue of trees that led away from the Lodge.

"If I only could find him," he said to himself. "It is almost time to strike, but I want one more interview with him before giving the blow. Hello! where the devil am I, anyway?"

He had wandered from the path in the intensity of his meditations, and just ahead of him, in the midst of a little clearing, was a cabin he had not seen before.

Dismounting, he tied his horse and crept cautiously forward until beneath the window, when raising himself slowly, he peered into the hut.

The moon trembled in through the cracks on the opposite side, and sitting just where a streak of light fell across his face was a man.

With a little cry of pleasure, Roebuck sprang up.

"Ralph Gordon, by all that's lucky!"

He had wandered straight to Vega's hut, and who shall say it was not Special Providence!

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE DREAMER AWAKES.

TRUE to her promise, at twelve o'clock the next day Lorna was at Vega's cabin, and there she found Ralph waiting for her.

His first movement upon her arrival was to take her in his arms and tell her that he loved her, for he had thought deeply on the matter after Roebuck had left him, and had come to the conclusion that at last his heart was captured.

"You—love me?" she asked, in astonishment.

"Yes—why not?"

"And I so wicked?"

"But that is not your fault, my darling; and besides, we are going to give Lady Lorna her rights."

Then Ralph told her all that had happened to him lately; what a villain Crandyl was, and what measures he had taken to defeat him, and added:

"I saw Roebuck but a little while ago, and now, as soon as an opportunity offers, Gordon Crandyl, *alias* Captain Ironnerve, shall be in prison, with ample opportunity to test the quality of prison-fare. If you should see this Baldo, of whom you spoke, be careful not to mention my name to him, so that he will have any idea that I am near by, for he is one of Crandyl's satellites, I take it, and would like

nothing better than to gratify his captain with my capture."

And so they left for the old tree, wandering along through the woods that Lorna knew so well, almost forgetful of their mission, so engaged were they in their own happiness.

Ralph knew that he was risking a good deal in this bearding the lion in his den, but then he depended considerably upon Roebuck, who knew of his intentions, and would be waiting in the tree for them.

He would have left Lorna behind had he known how much they were risking, but Roebuck had assured him that the part of the cavern near the tree was very seldom, if ever, occupied by any of the men, and that there would be really nothing to fear; besides, he admired her courage, and thought himself amply able to protect her from any danger that might arise.

Arrived at the tree, they seated themselves some distance off, behind a convenient growth of dwarf pines, and waited, as had been previously agreed between Ralph and Roebuck.

A half-hour might have passed away in this manner, when the concealed door of the tree was seen to open, and Roebuck came out.

The signal was given, and soon the three were conversing together.

It was finally agreed that Ralph and Roebuck should enter the tree and rescue the Lady Lorna, while Gipsy Lorna awaited them outside.

It was with some misgivings that Lorna let them go without her, but then she knew that her presence would only cramp their movements, so she consented to wait.

She saw them enter the tree, and close the door behind them, but she stilled the beating of her heart and waited.

The gentle breeze and the odor of the flowers, together with the sleepless night she had passed, all united to lull her off to sleep, and Morpheus gently closed her eyes in slumber.

The sun was quite low when she awoke with a start.

She looked at her watch. It was half-past five.

She had been sleeping nearly four hours; surely time enough for Ralph to have gone and returned a dozen of times.

Still she waited, a deathlike fear at her heart.

The sun sunk lower and lower, until the tops of the trees hid him from view, and still she waited.

The sun went down. The night-birds began to whirr about in the woods over her head, and every now and then the dismal who—o—o of an owl would awake the echoes, but these sounds had no terrors for her, as they had for the other Lorna, and still she waited on.

Darkness came on—deep, black, awful night—but Lorna, true to her watch, still sat there, waiting for her lover to return; but he came not, and every cry of the night-birds seemed to tell of some awful fate that had befallen him.

"Oh, Ralph! Ralph! where are you?" she moaned, in her agony. "Don't you know that Lorna is waiting for you here? and oh, it is so cruel to remain away so long! My darling! my darling! what has happened—what has happened?" but the night sent back no answer to her question.

At last, in a fit of desperation, she resolved to try the old signal with which she had once before summoned Baldo, and passing hastily to the tree, she struck it as she did so long—oh, it seemed so long—before.

But a moment passed, and sure enough, the door was thrown open, and Baldo came out into the night.

"Lorna! you here?" he exclaimed.

"Yes—I am here," she replied, simply.

"What do you want at this hour? Don't you know you will be missed at the Lodge?"

"I care not," she replied. "I want to see the other Lorna; where is she?"

"Inside, of course. Why do you wish to see her?"

"Because I have done wrong in taking her place, and—and I want to see if she is getting any better."

"Dreadfully conscientious all at once, ain't you?" he growled. "Well, come in. Since you are here, I suppose you will have to, but mind you! I'd a d—d sight rather you hadn't come," and he led the way into the tree.

Now if the truth be known, Lorna did not feel one-half the concern for her namesake, that she did for the fate of Ralph, but she

knew it was not best for the real reason for her presence to be known, and she thought that once inside, she should surely hear something of him.

Baldo led the way straight to his underground parlor, and there, sure enough, was Lady Lorna Atherton, still dressed in the habiliments of a boy.

Once again the two Lornas were face to face.

"I'll leave you together for a while," said Baldo. "There's some work of a new kind to be done to-night, and I must be there to help."

"What is it?" asked Lorna, as he was passing from the room.

"Oh, nothing much; only if you should happen to hear any howling, don't pay any attention because it's nothing that will affect you here," and with these words he left the room.

Oh, what a fear was at her heart!

"Has anything happened here to-night?" she asked of her companion.

"Yes."

"What was it? Quick!"

"There was a man who came here and tried to carry me off."

"Well—well!" and poor Lorna wrung her hands together; the suspense was terrible.

"Why, when he took hold of me I screamed; then something struck him from behind and they carried him away."

"Where—where! oh, where did they take him?" and in her agony Lorna grasped her companion by the arm and held it tightly.

"I don't know where they took him," she replied impatiently. "Don't pinch my arm so, or I will scream again and something will strike you from behind."

"Fool—fool!" cried Lorna with deep contempt. "You have killed the man who risked his life to rescue you! Do you hear? You have killed him—killed him—killed him! Oh, my God! Is there no help for him? Vega—Vega! help your Lorna now, for she needs your help!" and the poor child sunk upon her knees and buried her face in her hands.

"Lorna—Lorna—who said Lorna?" asked the demented one in a dazed sort of way. "Lorna? I have heard that name before; but where—where?" and she passed her hand wearily over her forehead as if to collect her thoughts.

"Where—where?" she continued dreamily. "Yes—yes! I remember. The woods! see how dark it grows, and the great limbs look like giant arms, reaching down to grasp me. Ugh!" and she paused, and Gipsy Lorna, sitting sobbing on the floor looked up and listened.

"Yes—yes!" the dreamer went on, while her whole aspect was that of a person terribly excited. "They are following me! I can hear them howling and wrangling behind me. *See! they are wolves! they will devour me! Help—help!*"

She paused a moment, and then went on more quietly.

"Oh! what is this—a cabin? I will enter. There are the remains of a fire—some one has been here."

She went through the action of blowing the sparks into a flame, and all the while Lorna upon the floor was watching her with intense eagerness.

"Some one sleeping," she went on at last. "I will wake her," and she spoke to the imaginary sleeper gently, then suddenly starting back, she struck her hands wildly against her forehead.

"Dead—DEAD!" she cried. "My God! I AM ALONE WITH A CORPSE!" and with a wild cry she fell crashing to the floor.

Lorna sprang to her feet, and hastened to the fallen girl's assistance.

She chafed her brow and hands, and spying a brandy bottle upon the table, poured some of its contents between her lips.

Slowly the Lady Lorna opened her eyes.

"Where am I?" she asked, faintly. "Who are you?"

"I am Lorna!"

"Lorna? Why, that is my name."

"It is mine also."

"But how came I here? I was lost in the woods, and I found a cabin where there was a dead woman. How came I here, and in this dress?" she continued, looking down at her male attire.

"You have been very ill," said Lorna, "and were brought here. Lie still and you will be better in a moment."

And Lady Lorna closed her eyes, feeling that she was safe, at least.

She had recovered her mind at last.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE GRAVE GIVES UP ITS DEAD.

WHEN Ralph and Roebuck entered the tree, they went forward very cautiously, for they knew well that, if discovered, their lives would not be worth a moment's purchase.

Roebuck led the way through the passage, touching the secret spring of the great door, and remarking as he did so:

"This arrangement would kill a whole army if they did not know its secret," and then he explained its mechanism to his companion, and Ralph shuddered to think what might be the fate of any one who should try to force admittance.

"Did you send the word I told you to?" asked the detective, in a low tone, once when they had paused to perfect their plan of operations.

"Yes," replied Ralph. "There will be a posse of police and a full company of soldiers at Vega's cabin, conducted there by Mosquito, at twelve o'clock to-night."

"But in case anything should happen so that neither of us can get there, how will they discover the Den?"

"God only knows! If we should be discovered," continued Ralph, a sudden burst of inspiration coming to him, "you must act upon the aggressive at once, no matter what they do with me; then, as soon as you can get away, hurry as fast as you can and bring the soldiers and officers here to rescue me. You know you could do nothing alone, anyway."

This course of action was agreed upon between them, and then they hurried forward.

Reaching the door of Munger's—or Baldo's—apartment, Ralph, after telling Roebuck that he had better await him outside, pushed open the door and entered.

There was only a dim light burning in the room, and by its aid Ralph saw a form stretched sleeping upon the couch, but he did not see another—and that of a man—dozing in an easy-chair in one of the dark corners.

It was Munger, and he saw Ralph almost as soon as he had pushed open the door, but he chose to wait before striking, although he kept him covered with a revolver the whole time.

Ralph went straight up to the Lady Lorna, and touching her upon the shoulder said:

"Awake, Lorna! It is I—Ralph—and I have come to save you; to take you away."

Munger had noiselessly risen from his chair, and creeping forward, he stood close behind Ralph, with a short iron bar raised, ready to strike.

Lady Lorna opened her eyes when Ralph touched her, and waking from a sound sleep as she did, she was frightened.

Springing up, she screamed loudly for help, and Ralph turned to speak to her again, when there was a swish through the air; a dull thud, and he fell to the floor beneath the blow dealt by Jim Munger.

The counterfeiter chuckled as Ralph fell, then crossing the room to a bell rope, he pulled it three times in succession, and in less than two minutes, a dozen men were in the room.

Munger merely pointed to the prostrate form of Ralph, and they raised him and bore him away.

"I've none you one service at least, Gordon Crandyl," said Munger, as the men bore Ralph away, and then he stretched himself once more in his easy chair in the corner, after comforting his prisoner as best he could.

He was still there, when the electric bell, connected with the tree, announced Lorna's wish to enter.

The counterfeiter bore Ralph through the corridor to the press-room where restoratives were applied, and the captain was sent for, and when he opened his eyes, he found Crandyl leaning over him with an evil smile on his face.

"Out of the frying-pan, into the fire; eh, my boy?" said he, mockingly, but Ralph only smiled scornfully back at him, and said:

"All the same, Captain Ironnerve, I will copper the knaves to lose, and make it a call-turn at that."

"Ralph Gordon, I like your pluck," said Crandyl, struck with a sudden idea. "I'll tell you what I'll do. If you will join us, I will call it square."

"Thanks, captain"—scornfully—"but the fact is, I don't like your company, so I will have to decline the honor."

"As you will; but mind you! you'll be sorry."

"We will see."

"We will see!"

"Boys!" he continued, turning to his men, "carry him to the council-chamber, and prepare the worst tortures you know how."

They raised him, and soon he was in the very chamber where we have already witnessed the initiation of Philip Roebuck. This time it was brilliantly lighted; white globes replacing the red ones.

"Let his eyes be put out first," ordered Ironnerve, and Ralph was strapped to a long deal-table, while an iron bar was thrust into a hot fire.

Ralph shuddered as well he might, for what is more horrible than to feel that one's eyes are about to be *burned out*, and be powerless to offer any resistance.

The irons were heated until they were fairly white, and little jets of fire dropped hissing from them. Then one of the men, seizing them, approached his victim.

Ralph lay prone upon his back. He saw the man drawing near with the cruel irons, ready to deprive him of his sight. He shivered as with the cold, but was resolved to die game, and he looked his tormentor unflinchingly in the face.

The fellow bent forward. The iron was within a foot of Ralph's face, and already he could feel the heat from it.

Closer and closer it came.

Water began to run from his eyes, and he was dazed and blinded as one is when he looks at the sun on a hot summer's day.

Closer yet! He felt that the time had come, but no groan escaped him.

"Hold!"

The cry was clear and distinct, although uttered in a feminine voice, and Captain Ironnerve sprung from his chair as if propelled by some unseen force, while the executioner dropped his iron to the floor and turned with a cry of rage and fear.

There, in the door which led to the corridor, stood the figure of a woman—almost a girl. A red merino dress, trimmed with gold lace and velvet, adorned her person, and in her left hand she held a tambourine, while the right hand was extended, the index finger pointing straight at the counterfeiter captain.

With a wild cry of fear he sprung to his feet and looked toward the door.

"Lorna Lenola! YOU HERE!" he cried. *My God! Can the grave give up its dead?"*

"Yes!" she replied, "to prevent such hellish work as that. Loose that man!" and she pointed to Ralph, but Crandyl did not move, while his men, one and all, stood as if chained to the floor.

The figure came forward, and, drawing a knife from her girdle, cut the cords that bound Ralph to the table.

"Rise!" she said, and Ralph obeyed, hardly believing his senses as he did so; but then he was loose, that much he knew, and he sprung from the table.

It broke the spell, and, with savage oaths, the counterfeiter rushed forward.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE NOOSE TIGHTENS.

If the reader will pardon me for a few moments' digression from the prime circumstances of the tale, I would once more like to return to Lillian Leonard whom we left at the St. James in Washington, awaiting the success of Dick Prince's scheme—or rather his pretended scheme—in search of Ralph Gordon.

We have already seen how the lad Mosquito foiled him twice, so that there was a probability of Lillian's waiting some length of time before she should see Ralph again, unless some other means were brought about to effect it.

Word reached her almost every day, from Prince, but she became unsatisfied with this, and being wise enough to know that if she was wanted very badly by the police, they would not be very long in finding her in the hiding-place she had chosen, she resolved to return to her home in Richmond and run the risk of any dangers which such an action on her part might incur.

Accordingly, without communicating her intention to Prince, she one morning took the train for home.

Arrived there, she found things about as she

had left them, and also three letters from Ralph, which at once quieted her fears for him, and then she set about devising some means of communicating with him.

The letter which bore the latest date was headed "Laurel Lodge," and Lillian conjectured at once that he was hiding somewhere near there. It was only a brief note which Ralph had dashed off, on the night he had spent in Vega's cabin, and in substance, informed her that he was tightening the meshes about his enemies, and could soon walk free once more, the streets of Richmond.

She at once sent for Prince, and told him what she had heard, and he—disappointed of course, at once more being "come up to," told her that he would take a posse of police, and go to Ralph's assistance.

Upon this conclusion, Lillian decided to accompany him, and so, at about the very hour, when Ralph and Philip Roebuck were entering the counterfeiters' den through the Sighing Pine, Lillian in company with Prince and twelve officers of the law in citizens' dress—took the train from Richmond for the station nearest to the point they wished to reach.

It was a strange freak of destiny that led them to that part of the forest where they wished to go, for none of them had any idea of the locality in which they would find Ralph or the counterfeiters.

Although strongly urged not to, Lillian was firm in her resolution to accompany them, though why, she could not herself have told, for she was naturally timid—at least she had always thought so.

And so the little company took their course through the woods, the officers grumbling about "havin' a petticoat along," but Prince was firm, and as they were under his orders, they were compelled to obey.

Some distance had been passed over in this way, but Prince was a man who believed in luck, and he thought something would turn up to decide their course of action.

Quietly they went forward, when suddenly Prince stopped.

"I see a cabin ahead there," he said. "Wait here until I reconnoiter."

It was beginning to get dark, and Prince crept forward carefully.

He was gone about twenty minutes, when he returned.

"All right," he said. "The cabin is deserted and it will be a good place for us to make a stop while two or three of us scout around a little."

The reader probably conjectures that it was Vega's cabin where they made their halt, and Prince, after seeing to Lillian's comfort, and giving a few instructions to his men, started off through the woods.

The men sat idly around smoking and conversing in low tones, when suddenly there was a sound of tramping feet, and the force that Ralph had sent for, headed by Mosquito, entered the clearing.

There was a general grasping of weapons, and preparations for attack and defense, and the captain of the military cried:

"Who goes there?"

"We are officers of the law, and demand your immediate surrender," replied one of the force at the cabin.

"So are we!" was the unexpected response, and then general explanations ensued, and soon all was harmony again.

"Be you Miss Leonard?" asked Mosquito, going up to Lillian, and, receiving an affirmative response, he added:

"Mr. Gordon will be here at midnight, I reckon. He said he would, an' he's right smart at keepin' his word."

Prince returned after a long and fruitless search, and it was with mingled joy and chagrin that he found the extra force there; but he was diplomatic, and resolved to make the best of what he termed a bad bargain, so, going to Mosquito, he said:

"You checkmated me, my boy, but I'm glad of it, for I know now, 'which is which and which ain't.'"

Roebuck paused in front of the door of Munger's room, and allowed Ralph to enter alone, and he waited and listened.

He heard Ralph speak to Lady Lorna, and he also heard the dull thud as the implement used by Munger struck his friend upon the head.

His first impulse was to rush to his assistance, but he remembered the instructions that

Ralph had given him, and controlled himself, for he also recollected that there was a bell from Munger's apartment to the press-room, and knew that the counterfeiter would immediately ring for assistance.

He was right, for the next moment he heard the men coming hastily along the corridor, and when they entered the room where Ralph was, he entered with them.

His chief desire was to ascertain how badly Ralph was hurt, and then, too, he must allay suspicion.

One careful look showed him that his friend was only stunned, and, when they bore their prisoner to the press-room, he went with them, and when some one said the captain was wanted, it was he who volunteered to go for him, for he knew that it was the best way to leave without suspicion, and, besides, he wanted to be sure that Captain Ironnerve was there before the descent was made. Accordingly he hastily made his exit by the cabin entrance, forgetting all about Lorna in the excitement of the moment.

Springing upon one of the horses kept by the counterfeiters, he rode to Laurel Lodge, where he found Crandyl.

"You're wanted at the Den, captain," he said. "Ralph Gordon has been captured, and the men want to know what to do with him. Here! take my horse, and I will return on one of yours," and, with an exclamation of pleasure, Crandyl leaped to the horse's back and dashed away through the woods.

Then Roebuck, after having one of the captain's horses saddled, hastened away toward Vega's cabin, for he knew there was no time to lose.

CHAPTER XXXII.

BROUGHT TO BAY—THE BATTLE.

WHEN Roebuck reached Vega's cabin he was surprised to find such a large force awaiting him, but he quickly informed the captain in command of the circumstances which had happened, and one and all took up the line of march swiftly, but noiselessly as possible, for the pine tree, for Roebuck thought that the best means of entrance, as he knew that the whole force of counterfeiters would be in the council-chamber, witnessing the execution.

The pine was reached, and with an ax the detective attacked the tree, much to the men's astonishment, who thought he must be crazy, trying to hew down such an immense pine when such important work was on hand. However, their wonder was soon increased by seeing Roebuck thrust his arm through a hole he had made with his ax, and presently a door flew open.

Motioning them to follow, he led the way inside, and in single file they went after him, until all had disappeared.

Roebuck led the way straight to the great door, as he had done once before that night, and again he explained the fate which would have befallen them, had they attempted an entrance alone.

Straight through the corridor he led them; past the press-room, which was now deserted, then turning through the branch hallway toward the council-chamber.

When in the vicinity of the room where he knew the counterfeiters were congregated, he motioned them to move with more caution, and then went on.

Once the detective thought he saw two shadows moving ahead of him, but he kept on, feeling that a moment's hesitation might be Ralph Gordon's death, and even now, he did not know but that he might be too late.

Although a man, not given particularly to religious ideas, in his heart he offered up a fervent prayer for Ralph's salvation, as he moved cautiously along.

Not a sound could be heard but the gentle footfalls of the men behind him, and their half-suppressed breathing as they crept so cautiously and yet so determinedly forward.

True, once in a while, a low murmur might be distinguished ahead of them, down the corridor, but that was all, save the roaring that intense and forced silence always generates in one's ears.

On and on, they crept, and their hearts throbbed quicker and quicker as the end of their venture drew nearer and nearer. Each man of that loyal band felt that this might be his last

expedition on earth, but this fact did not appall them at all; it only stimulated them to greater exertion when the decisive moment should be at hand.

They draw near the door; there is a slim streak of light visible through a crack where some one has evidently carelessly closed it.

Suddenly it is thrown wide open, and they see a figure leap through it, and hear the cry: "Hold!"

They pause and look questioningly at each other.

This is a new feature of the drama that they had not expected.

Captain Ironnerve's hoarse exclamation comes to them as he acknowledges the presence of some supernatural being, and then they hear the words that follow, and also know that, whoever the figure is, she has freed a captive from imminent danger.

Then comes the wild shout of the counterfeiters as they leap forward to annihilate the two who are in the room, and with an answering shout they crowd through the doorway, not noticing a slender, girlish figure that precedes them but an instant.

Then a wild scene of confusion follows. Hoarse shouts, fierce exclamations—the explosion of fire-arms, and the groans of the wounded and dying, are mingled with the cheers of the soldiers and the curses of the desperadoes.

Some are engaged in hand-to-hand combat, while the bullets whistle and hiss through the hot and smoky atmosphere.

The counterfeiters are fighting for their lives, for they know, should one of them escape this carnage, they will have to live out the rest of their days in close confinement, and they curse, and swear, and shout out hoarse guttural exclamations of desperation and rage, as they see their numbers becoming smaller and smaller, and know and feel that this is their last chance.

In vain they add bull-dog tenacity to the wild courage of desperation; in vain they throw themselves upon their foes and fight until the blood runs in clotted streams from the wounds they receive.

Even when too weak to stand, they pull their revolvers from their belts and fire from the floor at the men they hate—the men who are depriving them of life and liberty.

"Kill them—show no mercy!" shouts Ironnerve, as he fights with two of the officers at one end of the room, and at last, striking them both down, leaps upon another, only to be again successful.

His teeth are locked tightly together, and he fights as only a man, half human, half-demon, can fight, when he knows it is his last chance.

Through the heavy curtains of smoke, Ralph sees him. (He has seized a weapon and is doing his part) and he uses every exertion to get near the man he hates.

Nearer and nearer they draw to each other, and both are anxious that the meeting shall come, and the sooner the better.

Down falls the man with whom Ralph is coping, and at the same instant Ironnerve cleaves the soldier's skull, with whom he is fighting.

They are together.

For a moment they pause and eye each other, and then the fight commences.

Clash—clash! goes the steel, as their swords cross. Pistols have long been cast aside empty and useless, and now swords, and knives and clubs, and any and every missile they can lay hands on, are swung swiftly around; are cut slashing through bones and flesh, or fly hurtling through the air.

Clash! clash! clash! go their weapons.

Ralph drives his enemy back against the wall, and there they make a stand.

The counterfeiter lunges forward, and Ralph feels a sharp sting. He knows he is cut, but he fights on, shutting his teeth tight together, determined to win the battle.

Again the captain lunges, but Ralph catches his sword, and sends it flying fully ten feet away; but before he can recover himself, his opponent has sprung wildly forward and grasped him by the throat.

There is a desperate struggle—a hand-to-hand encounter in which the stronger and more skillful is bound to win.

To and fro they sway, tightly locked in each other's arms, and the muscles strained to their highest tension.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HEAVEN CLAIMS ITS OWN—THE MYSTERY SOLVED.

STEADILY the fight goes on.

Ralph Gordon and Captain Ironnerve rock to and fro in their almost superhuman efforts for the mastery.

Suddenly they loose their hold and stand panting and glaring at each other.

Then they rush forward again, but Ironnerve holds a murderous looking knife, which one of his men, in the last agony of death has thrust into his hand, and then succumbed to all-powerful fate.

With one last desperate effort the counterfeiter leaps forward and his fingers close tightly around Ralph's throat, and he is borne to the floor.

Down goes Ralph, and Captain Ironnerve's knee is upon his breast.

The knife is raised, and descends—but a figure has thrown itself beneath the weapon, and it finds a different sheath than the hand that directs it sought.

Captain Ironnerve springs to his feet with a wild cry of horror, and the knife drops from his palsied hand and rattles to the floor.

"Lorna!" he cries in his agony. "My God, I have killed Lorna!"

It was only too true.

She had seen the knife descending which would deprive Ralph of his life, and with one despairing cry had cast her own body beneath it, and now she is dying.

With the hollow, mocking laugh of a maniac, Gordon Crandyl once more seizes the knife and raises it.

Several rush forward, but too late. The fatal weapon is imbedded in his own breast, and he sinks to the floor with a smothered groan.

The fight is over.

The counterfeiters—that is, the few of them who are left alive, are huddled together in a corner, tightly manacled, where they sit with sullen faces, now and then muttering deep curses upon the men who have gained the victory.

Lady Lorna Atherton has been conveyed to another part of the room, where she is slowly breathing her last.

Ralph bends over her, and tears are in the strong man's eyes as he thinks what she has sacrificed for him.

"Good-by, Ralph," she says, faintly, and a gentle smile hovers about her lips. Good-by—and God bless—you! I—wanted—to save—you—Ralph; thank—God, I—succeed—ed. Good-by, dar—darling; it—is better—thus."

"Oh, Lorna!" Ralph sobs. "I had rather die a thousand deaths than have had this happen to you. Why, why did you do it?"

"Because I love you—darling," she gasps. "Kiss—me—dear," she goes on. "It—is better—so. You—will think—of me some—time—when—I—am—up there—won't—you?"

"Think of you, Lorna!" he says, chokingly, as he bends over and kisses her. "Would to God I could forget!"

"No—no! Not—that," she whispers, for she is getting too weak to speak. "Do not—forget—that I—loved—you. God thinks—it best—that—" she chokes a little and then continues, "that I—should go—Where—is—the other—Lorna?"

"Here," sobs Ralph, and Lorna, in the dress of a Gipsy dancing girl—the dress in which she had so startled Crandyl—steps forward.

"Kiss me," the dying girl says, "for—I feel—that we—are sisters. You—you will—be good—to—good to—Ralph? Up there—where I—am going—I can watch—over—you both—"

She pauses, and another hemorrhage makes her gasp for breath; but she recovers a little, and, although much weaker, continues:

"See!" she whispers. "My moth—mother—is—there—and I—can—see the—beau—tiful—angels—waiting to take—me home—"

She raises her hands and an inspired look comes into her eyes—a look of rapture that only one near the gates of Heaven could have.

"I—am coming—darling—coming—home. Take—me in—your arms—my mother; no—more pain—or sad—ness—or sor—row. It is—dark—here—but—the light—is grand—up there. I—am—coming—thank—God."

She is dead.

For a long time Ralph's strong frame is shaken by sobs, but he tenderly covers all that is left of Lorna Atherton with a piece of the

muslin which he pulls from the wall, and then he draws the other Lorna away.

She, too, is crying, for she can feel for the one who is no more, having herself discovered what it is to love.

One of the soldiers comes to Ralph.

"Ironnerve's goin' under," he says, "and he's asked for you," and Ralph accompanies the man to the other end of the room, where he finds Gordon Crandyl, *alias* Captain Ironnerve, suffering intensest agony.

"It has come," he says, between his catching breath, as Ralph draws near. "You kept your word, my boy; the knave lost, and you have won."

"I am sorry for you, Crandyl," says Ralph, and he means it, for he is sorry that the man before him is so steeped in crime.

"Yes, I think you are, Ralph. Bend lower; I have something to say to you," and Ralph bends over the prostrate form and listens.

What he heard was given between long pauses, but it was as follows:

"I do not deserve any mercy or consideration from you," said Crandyl, "but there are some things which you ought to know. I had thought never to tell you, but to-night has changed things for us all."

"My life has been an eventful one, but there are some pages in its history, for which I hope the Lord will give me credit."

"Eighteen years ago, your brother Tom, Paul Leonard and myself started together for a tour around the world, traveling west from England. We did the circuit but instead of returning from St. Petersburg home, we went to Spain, and there the man whom you knew as uncle Paul Leonard—and who in reality was my half-brother, met Lorna Lenola."

"She was a beautiful Gipsy girl, with great black eyes, that shone like coals of fire, or melted like drops of evening dew."

"He—Paul—loved her, and without my knowing it, used my name in courting her. Paul was also unprincipled, even more so than myself, and God knows that is bad enough."

"We could not get him to come away; something held him there, and one day he told us he had married this little Gipsy queen."

"Time went on in its relentless way, and finally, one day, your brother was taken violently sick, but there was really not much danger; still he thought he was going to die, and in the face of this idea, he gave Paul the power of attorney over all his property, which you know was very large, and which you have always thought he gambled away."

"This was all Paul and I wished for. We saw a chance to better our condition, for neither of us were rich, and so—we—well, he would have recovered had we allowed him to—but he died, and Paul and I fled."

"We had for a valet, a fellow named Mengari—half Italian and half English, although favoring the latter in looks. This fellow accused Paul of Tom's murder, and Paul struck him with a knife, and left him there for dead."

"We fled—my brother leaving his young wife without bidding her good-by—and returned to England."

"You know your mother died soon after your father, in giving birth to a daughter, whom you always supposed died at the same time, but that was not so. Your aunt, Paul's third wife, had just lost a child, and they took little Lillian, resolved to bring her up as their own, and the one redeeming feature of Paul Leonard's life, was the love he always bore that child."

Ralph started back, and a great emotion shook his whole body, as he exclaimed:

"Then Lillian Leonard—"

"Is your own sister; and Ralph, as much as I have hated and wronged you, it gives me joy—makes my death easier, to make you, in a measure, happier."

"Go on—go on!" said Ralph. "Who then, is or was—Lorna Atherton?"

"She was Paul's daughter by his first wife, with whom he was always fighting, so that soon after the birth of her daughter, she got a divorce, and in doing so, she took the name of Atherton. Afterward I married her, but she soon died, and I was left with Paul's daughter to care for; and no man ever loved a daughter better than I loved her."

"But Lorna Atherton, being of the first wife, how does it happen that the names should be—"

"A coincidence, that is all, and the likeness between the two Lornas, is a freak of nature which I could never understand. Let me tell

the story in my own way. I have only got a few moments to live.

"Time went on, and finally, after the death of our wives, Paul and I came to America to live. Afterward, you came over, and on the steamer with you, was the Gipsy Queen, Vega, whom you told me about, and whom you thought was crazy, though with a strange method in her madness."

"In some way, she found out Paul, and went to him, but he turned her away, refusing to recognize his own daughter, preferring the love of the one he had adopted—your sister."

"Soon after this, Paul and I had a serious misunderstanding, which ended in our utterly ignoring each other's existence, and as months went by, we drew wider and wider apart."

"Then I conceived the idea of organizing this gang of counterfeiters, which you and Roebuck have broken up, and not long after that, Mengari came to me from nobody—knows—where, and I made him my lieutenant, he passing under the name of Munger. It was he who murdered Paul."

"Yes," commented Ralph. "But he has paid for it. He was killed in the fight by Roebuck."

"The very man whom he brought here. Fate again."

Crandyl pauses and calls for brandy, and, upon its being administered, goes on:

"The two Lornas are half-sisters, and daughters of Paul Leonard's, who was your uncle by his third marriage, which was no marriage at all, and it is Heaven's kindness that both children born of that union died."

"Lady Lorna was my niece by birth and my daughter by marriage, and we always gave her her mother's title—Lady."

It was all clear now—the mystery that had puzzled Ralph so much.

"When we were about to torture you," Crandyl goes on again, "Lorna—Gipsy Lorna—dashed into the room dressed exactly as her mother was, and I thought her a spirit. Where she got the dress I do not know, unless Munger brought it here with him. He knew the Spanish Gipsies, and I have always thought, was allied to them in some way. It must have been an inspiration that told her to don that garb."

"Yes," echoed Ralph. "And it saved my life."

"That is all I have to tell," Crandyl added, while his face was convulsed with pain. "I am going now to meet the Almighty Judge. Can you forgive me, Ralph? I think He will be more lenient if you are, whom I have wronged so."

"Yes, Gord. I can forgive you now."

Crandyl looks up with unspeakable thanksgiving in his eyes, and with a fervent, though gasping "God bless you!" a fierce trembling shakes his whole body, and then, with one wild cry of more than mortal agony, his form stiffens out, and Gordon Crandyl, *alias* Captain Ironnerve, the counterfeiter, is no more.

The mystery is solved at last.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

HARMONY—PEACE—AND QUIETUDE.

THE bodies of the slain ones have all been conveyed to their last resting place, and Ralph, Philip Roebuck, Mosquito, Lorna and Lillian are all at Laurel Lodge. Prince had sneaked off almost at the commencement of the battle, and he never molested our friends again. The prisoners were one and all conveyed to Richmond.

Lady Lorna has been interred near her favorite arbor, and that peaceful calm which always follows a storm, seems to fill the air.

Two months after the events narrated in our last chapter, Ralph leads Lorna to the altar, and there makes her his wife. And a charming wife she is; even more beautiful in her new office than she was as the wild Gipsy girl.

Mosquito has been sent away to get an education, and Ralph and his bride are spending their honeymoon near the scenes of Lorna's earliest infancy.

Lillian is back again in her old home in Richmond, and almost every evening brings a caller to whom she reads each of her brother's letters in which he is as intensely interested as herself. His name is Philip Rogers, or, as better known to us—Roebuck, and one day, but a year later, when Ralph and his wife have returned from abroad, there is another wedding,

and Lillian Gordon becomes Lillian Rogers, for better or for worse.

LETTER FROM RALPH GORDON TO MOSQUITO.

"MY DEAR BOY,—

"THIS morning brought us a new blessing—my wife and I. It is in the shape of a little atom of humanity which we speak of as Ralph Gordon, Jr. We are all glad to hear how well you are progressing in your studies, and hope one day to see the lad who stood by me through thick and thin, honor the name of Gordon which I was proud to give him ere he went out to fight the world afresh. Philip says he is jealous; that I have two sons and he none, but I tell him to wait with patience, and he may be also blessed some day. I must be brief, for to tell the truth, I am too happy to spend my time in letter-writing. All unite in sending love and well wishes."

"Your adopted father,

"RALPH GORDON."

Four years later.

EXTRACT FROM LETTER FROM MOSQUITO TO RALPH GORDON.

"MY MORE THAN FATHER:—

"In one year more I will finish my college course, and the faculty—that is one or two of them with whom I am a favorite—think that I stand fair to win the prize for extempore speaking."

"I am glad to learn that Mr. Rogers has ceased to be jealous of you, having himself received the usual benediction. Convey to him, and also his wife, my heartfelt congratulations. * * * * * With much love to all, and particularly to little Ralph, I am,

Yours devotedly,

"HARRY GORDON."

It is Christmas.

Once more they are all together at Laurel Lodge; Ralph Gordon, his wife and son, now a dashing lad of nearly six years; Philip Rogers, wife and daughter, and last, but by no means least, Mosquito—now known as Harry Gordon, the adopted son of, Ralph Gordon.

The waves of trouble that rolled over one dark chapter of their lives have all settled down into a peaceful calm, and the future looks bright for all.

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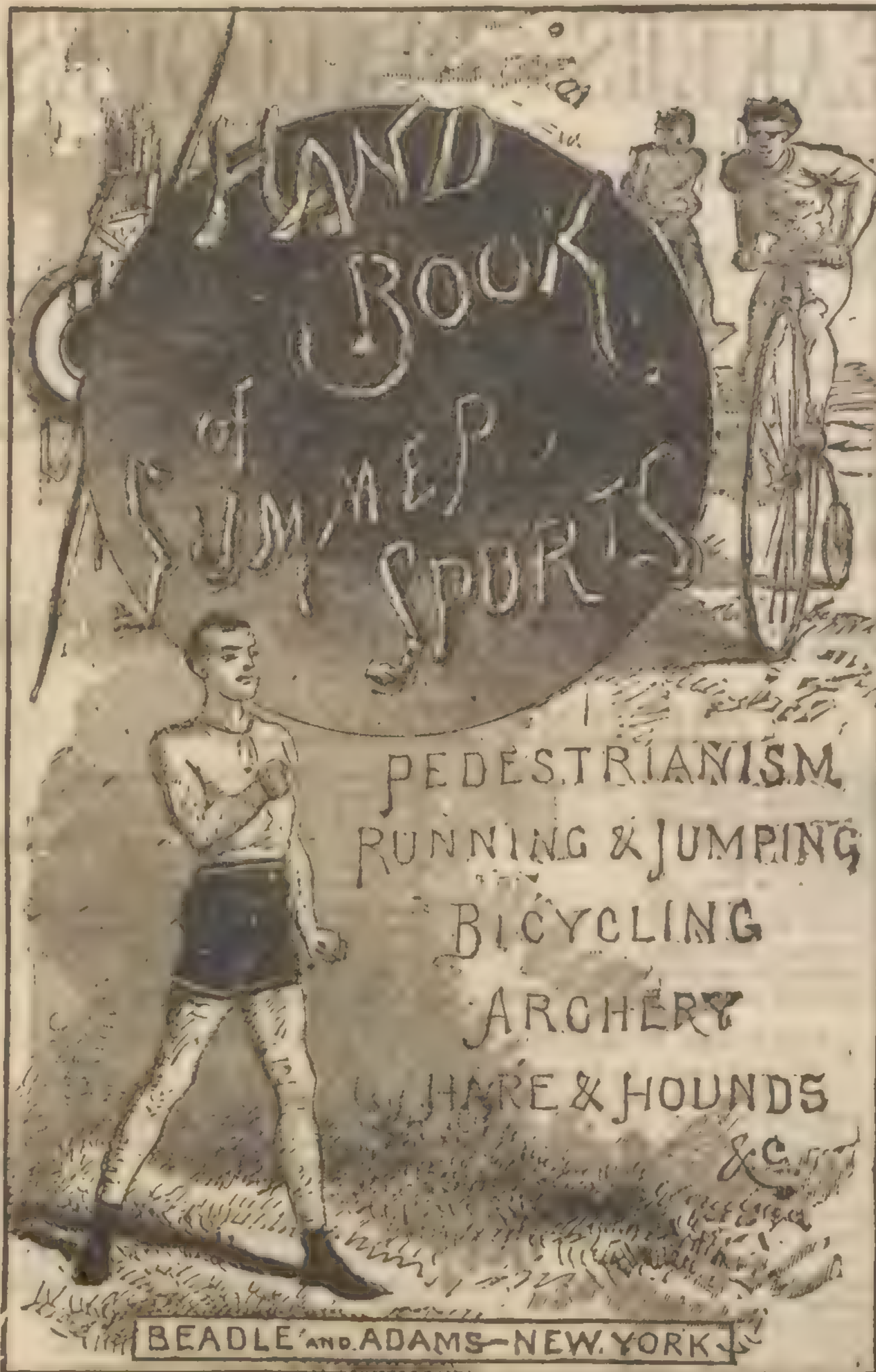
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